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1983

# THE EROTIC PLEASURES OF THE DANCE-CRAZE DISC

BY STUART COSGROVE

The Tango! The Mashed Potato! The Locomotion! All dances that significantly raised the adrenalin levels of various disapproving moral guardians. So how come they all ended up trying to do the Twist? Stuart Cosgrove charts the history of "the craze that encapsulates pleasure and desire".

'I have the misfortune of being an English instructor. I attempt to instil a bunch of bobby-soxers and drug-store Romeos with reverence for Hawthorne and Whitman and Poe . . . Their literary heritage is not what most of them treasure above all else! But they're sweet things! And in the spring, it's touching to notice them making their first discovery of love! I'll turn on the radio.' (Blanche Du Bois, *A Streetcar Named Desire*)

## TORTURED MEMORIES

If Blanche Du Bois had not been committed to a sanitorium towards the end of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, permanently disturbed by her own tortured memories of the death of her teenage lover, she would have had much to say about dance-craze music. The sight of the corpulent Chubby Checker provocatively dancing with the pubescent figure of 15 year old Dee Sharp to the sensual rhythms of "Slow Twistin'", seemingly innocent on the surface, would have tormented Blanche Du Bois. At the basis of her neurosis was an erotic desire for teenage passion which contradicted her social need to defend the declining values of an elite and aristocratic culture. She would have declared an undying passion for Mozart in public piaces but found the secret comforts of pleasurable narcissism dancing to "Let's Twist Again" in front of a painted mirror in a Louisiana hotel room. The distinctions between classical and popular culture that tormented Blanche were never a problem for Stanley Kowalski; he would have been the proud owner of a well-worn copy of The Dovell's "Hully Gully Baby".

In public representations of cultural value, the dance-craze has always shimmied alongside hula-hoops and soda-fountain romance comics in the basement of good taste, permanently ignored or rejected as trite and disposable music. The dance-craze disco — "The Locomotion", "Mashed Potato Time", "The Popeye Waddle" — has always resided on the borders of ephemera and eroticism, the subject of a property struggle between the conflicting generations of youth style and adult wish-fulfilment.

**'Dancing is a Part of Life  
It's One of the Thrills of Young  
America  
And Young America has been  
Responsible for Setting Most of  
the World's Dance Crazes  
We Did the Twist, the Monkey,  
the Duck and Now we're gonna  
do the Skate . . .'** (Richard  
Temple "That Beatin' Rhythm")

Richard Temple's vocal for the Jimmy Conwell instrumental "Cigarette Ashes" is a celebration of the dance-craze. It concentrates on the halcyon period of the early '60s, but points back across 50 years of history to the place that dance-craze music occupies in the popular culture of the USA. The phenomenon of dance-craze and the music that gives rise to new forms of social pleasure has always negotiated a curious relationship with orthodox life-styles.

The official views of the parent generation have consistently dismissed new dance-craze as either a wasteful fad or a sexual threat to the collective morality of youth. But the contradiction runs deeper still, in rejecting the dance-craze and its ephemeral music, the parent generation curiously desires



the craze. It wants to own that which it rejects. In the shifting attitudes of repudiation and desire and the contradictions of repulsion and fascination, the dance-craze disc becomes an object of derision and an object of desire. From the ragtime resonances of the Foxtrot to the erotic zones of the Disco Hustle, the dance-craze encapsulates pleasure and desire.

## HELLISH INSTITUTIONS

In the '20s the Mayor of Boston, John 'Honey Fitz' Fitzgerald (the grandfather of John F. Kennedy) banned any public displays of three notorious ragtime dances: the Turkey Trot, the Bunny Hug and the Grizzly Bear. Over 40 years later his grandson held twist



parties in the White House, and 10 years after that Jackie Onassis would swan into Studio 54 in the confident knowledge that one of Italy's most fashionable discotheques had chosen the name 'Jackie O' to signify its place on the itinerary of international chic.

What had happened to America's political elite in the intervening years, had it rejected the repressive intolerance of past catholicism in favour of the new myth of eternal political youth? Had it rejected the solemnity of immaculate conception for the erotic energies of Joey Dee and the Starlighters? In 1915 the fundamentalist demagogue Reverend Billy Sunday denounced

the Tango as 'the most hellish institution that ever wriggled from the depths of perdition', but 60 years later the southern baptism of Jimmy Carter's administration was liberated enough to contemplate its political aides doing the Bump at Tramps, even if it drew the line at snorting coke in the corners of Studio 54.

"Do the Hucklebuck", "Do the Froog", "Do the Monkey", "Do the Bird": what was the real meaning of the dance-craze disco? A public threat to the moral order? A symbolic enactment of latent desire? A high time at the hop? A way of imprinting the image of permanent youth on friends, onlookers and on the nation?

The Twist craze of the early '60s exemplified the musical and economic contradictions of dance-craze: it was appropriated by white youths who wanted a closer liaison with the sexual intrigue of black music, it briefly offered them a sexually encoded means of pleasure and extravagance, but invariably passed into recuperation. At home, worried about the forbidden shadows of the local record hop, parents loathed the Twist but their orthodoxy soon thawed when it became the centre of a vast, if impermanent, capitalist industry. When the Twist was taken up by the famous and became a safe object of commodity fetishism in the window of the local Drug Store, the parent generation rejected their own fears and were seduced by the energies of dance.

'Chubby Take it Easy  
Don't You Know We Got All Night  
There's No No Twisting' Like A  
Slow Slow Twisting  
When You've got All Night'.  
(Chubby Checker: "Slow Twisting")

'The Twist is on a par with the vulgarity, sensuality and indeed downright filth of modern magazines and movies' (Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961)

It is impossible to separate fact from fiction when confronting the world-wide popularity of the Twist. It managed to provoke the

indignation of *Pravda* in Russia and the medical establishment in the USA. But for quite different reasons it angered the conservative musical tastes of President Eisenhower. The Twist craze emerged directly out of R'n'B; it troubled old soldiers such as Eisenhower because it seemed to be reactivating the erotic excessiveness and youthful hedonism of rock and roll. The devil's music was once more insinuating its way into the rearguard trenches of white America and into the moral compound that the cold-warriors of the '50s had defended with determination.

By now the events which led Ernest Jones, a Philadelphian abattoir worker, to brief international stardom as Chubby Checker, are well known. The economically shrewd producers of the Cameo-Parkway company saw considerable potential in re-recording a Hank Ballard record entitled "The Twist" which had sold relatively well within the black market. By stripping Ballard's record of its explicit sexual associations and making a more sanitary version for the white teenage market, Cameo-Parkway only needed an acceptable frontman. Although the Twist and the figure of Chubby Checker (the name being an obvious derivation from Fats Domino) were synonymous in the minds of American Bandstand's national television audience, the origins of the Twist are to be found in the exotica of the Harlem Cotton Club..

#### 'SNAKE HIPS' TUCKER

In the '20s, Earl 'Snake Hips' Tucker was one of Black America's most sexually provocative popular dancers. Tucker was born with double-jointed hips and had the physical capacity to contort his body into unbelievable shapes. He assumed a flamboyant image as the boa-constrictor of the Cotton Club and delighted white audiences with his outrageous dance routines. As his pseudonym implies, 'Snake Hips' built his entire career around a series of licentious dances, which were



COLLUSION 5

usually variations of sexually explicit routines. Freud would have found Tucker a most interesting client; his entire attitude to performance was premised on the physical and symbolic properties of the snake. He danced the Cobra to the sound of Duke Ellington's Jungle Band in a theatrical environment that preceded Kid Creole's Coconuts by over 50 years. According to Cab Calloway (always a reliable sociological source), it was Earl Tucker's evocative imitation of the sexual act that in another era became the Twist.

### TANTALIZING A CUBAN

Throughout dance-music's fugitive history the snake, that threatening reptile of phallicentric power, has entwined its way around the trunks of a million plastic palm-trees. From the Cuban roots of Salsa came the Conga: a snake-like file of dancers following the beat of a single bass drum recreated in new contexts as a communal dance celebrating social intemperance. The wedding reception, the football crowd and the slapstick overkill of jazz-funk tribalism have all snaked to the beat. From Earl 'Fatha' Hines's "Tantalizing a Cuban" to Jamo Thomas and the Party Brothers's "Snake-Hip Mama", the serpent as saxophone coiled its way across the floor, reaching a climax of cruel and omniscient male sexuality in Al Wilson's dance-craze opus "The Snake".

'Aw shut up, silly woman, said the reptile with a grin  
You knew damn well I was a snake before you let me in...'

But the erotic pleasures of the dance-craze disc are not the unproblematic domain of male power and sexuality. Having freed itself from the conventions of dancing-partners, the Twist ushered in a new self-expressivity, a new liberation and a new kind of narcissism: public improvisation. From Josephine Baker at the Folies-Bergere to Dee Dee Sharp at the Peppermint Lounge, the dance-craze woman, always the object of male gaze, writhed to the undercurrents of a simple resistance. Whilst the producers at Cameo-Parkway lured Dee Dee Sharp towards the candy-bar soul of "Mashed Potato" and "Splish Splash", she always replied with a knowing rejection of her "Lover Boy" and resisted the pornography of the Junkman.

'You took my heart because you thought you could use it  
Just like a little boy you battered and bruised it  
I sold my heart to the Junkman and I'll never fall in love again', (Dee Dee Sharp "Sold My Heart to the Junkman")

'A'... dressed in a... and with her...

mother as a permanent chaperone, Dee Dee Sharp was the dance-craze kid who didn't quite fit. In 1962, when she made her debut on an uncredited duet with Chubby Checker, Dee Dee Sharp's contribution to "Slow Twistin'" brought sexual tensions to the surface. It was the year of Sam Cooke's "Twistin' the Night Away" and the Isley Brothers' "Twist and Shout". The image of an adolescent bobby-sox kid wanting to slow twist the night away stretched the fragile boundaries of moral permission. When Dee Dee Sharp asked for much more gravy on her mashed potatoes, it was never entirely clear what she meant. The teenager whose bark was fiercer than bow-wow-wow lived through exploitation but stayed one step ahead of the junkman.

'In the beginning the Twist was Chubby Checker and cunning fleshmerchants, who took him from his slaughterhouse, set him in such perpetual motion that he lost 40 pounds and unleashed him on the nation. They got rich, but he did not.' (Nick Cohn, *Rock Dreams*)

The cunning fleshmerchants of Cameo-Parkway, who had initially considered releasing "The Twist" by Danny and the Juniors before finally agreeing on Chubby Checker, were soon overtaken by more cynical entrepreneurs. Within months of Checker's "Let's Twist Again" being released, an entire network of Twist Lounges opened up throughout the States. Arthurs and the Peppermint Lounge in New York were alive with cash in discs and follow ups: Joey Dee's "Peppermint Twist",

### FROM ENERGY TO IMPOTENCE

Danny Peppermint's "Ya Ya Peppermint Twist", Gary 'U.S.' Bond's "Twist, Twist, Senora" and Chubby Checker's "Twist It Up". The inevitable welter of spurious new dance-craze followed in rapid succession: the Frog, the Bird, the Pussy Cat, the Popeye, the Pony and the Ride all claimed to be the next phenomenon.

Killer Joe Piro, one of New York's most ostentatious twist champions was immediately signed up to a Madison Avenue adver-

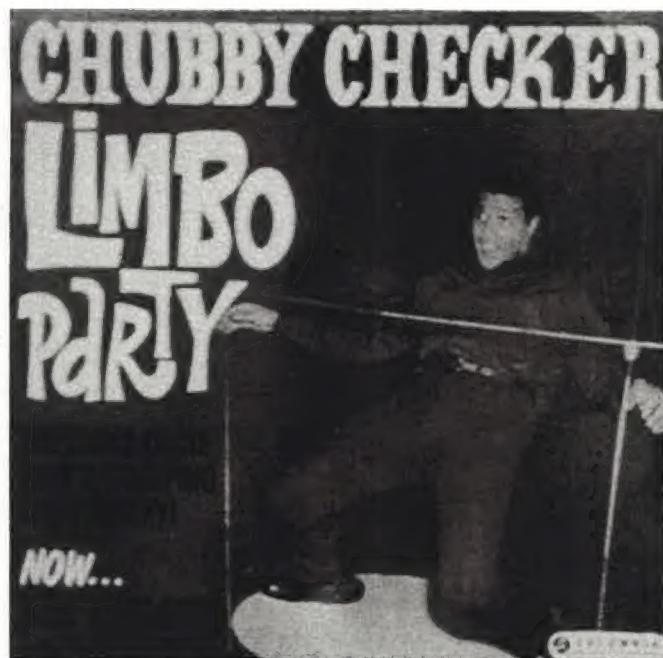
tising company who had the responsibility for marketing the Twist-roll, a new candy bar, and the Mule, a new, vodka-based cocktail. The dance that Piro invented to promote the mule - 'It looks tame but kicks like a mule' - failed to have any significant consumer response and was abandoned. As if to finally celebrate the Twist's passage from dance-craze eroticism into naked (s)exploitation, Chubby Checker released the L.P. *Limbo Party* which pushed bad-taste towards new horizons with tracks unbelievably entitled "When The Saints Go Limbo In" and "Banana Boat Limbo Song".

### TWISTIN' TEEZIE-WEEZIE

By 1972 the Twist had been taken up by the Mecca and Rank dancehall chains in Britain. Between them they squabbled over the rights to hold official Twist competitions in the major cities. (In order to guarantee his 15 minutes of fame in case it eluded him in later life, a former Glaswegian teddy boy, Billy Connolly, became the Twist champion of Scotland). An explanatory paperback, *Do the Twist*, sold over 125,000 copies in its initial sales; the ubiquitous Teezie Weezie Raymond announced a new twist coiffure which was essentially a beehive with variations, and Victor Sylvester demonstrated the basic routines on his BBC Ballroom Dancing programme.

If the British media were in doubt as to how they should deal with an imported dance-craze at the same time as trying to make sense of a provincial beat group boom, then Cameo-Parkway was in crisis. Having failed to permanently secure the rights to release the work of The Beatles through the Philadelphian subsidiary Swan Records, Cameo-Parkway desperately tried to make sense of the new British groups. In the only way they knew how, the company brought out the dance-craze disc "Do the Freddy", a musical tribute to Freddy and the Dreamers, on the flip side of Chubby Checker's "(At the) Discotheque".

In April 1963, the programme of the Queen's Ball, given at Windsor Castle to celebrate Princess Alexandra's engagement, included a twist session. Whatever unconscious sexual energy the twist may have had when it exuded from the hips of Dee Dee Sharp and Sam Cooke, stuttered into grotesque impotence on the floor of Windsor Castle. In the wake of Dee Dee Sharp's explicit dance-craze disc "Ride", the Orlons recorded a strangely prophetic number entitled "The Conservative". It signalled the end of the Twist's journey from the erotic to the repressed. When Quentin Hogg danced the twist at Princess Alexandra's party, even Blanche Du Bois would have abandoned her aristocratic fantasies, and moved on to another scene. The ecstasy was over. ○



### DANCE-CRAZE EROTICA

Chubby Checker	Let's Twist Again/The Twist	Cameo Parkway P824
Chubby Checker	(At the) Discotheque/Do the Freddy	Cameo Parkway P949
Dee Dee Sharp	Ride/Night	Cameo Parkway C230
Dee Dee Sharp	Do the Bird/Lover Boy	Cameo Parkway C244
Dee Dee Sharp	Wild/Why Dontcha Ask Me	Cameo Parkway C274
Candy & the Kisses	The 81/Two Happy People	Cameo Parkway C336
Lada Edmunds Jr.	The La Rue/Soul Au Go Go	M.C.A. 1724
Wendy Rene	Bar-B-Q/Young and Foolish	U.S. Stax 8255



# SUPERMARKET OF THE OMNIVERSE

## Sun Ra

photo by David Corio

### Sun Ra speaks:

I was sent to this planet by a Creator you know nothing about. I was trained by this Creator in music and everything else. I've seen some dances that you've never seen. I've heard some music you've never heard.

About three months ago I had a vision that I saw some materials that defy description. I saw some jewelry that's like nothing you've got on this planet. It was like a big supermarket that was the supermarket of the Omniverse. Everything in the Omniverse was in this market. I didn't see any walls. It was so big there were no walls.

I stopped at one counter where they had some socks. These socks were like they were alive. They were glittering like diamonds. I wondered how that could be. It wasn't like sequins. This was like they were *alive*. I wanted to know how much they cost. They said it was ninety dollars for one pair of socks. I said, "Well, I've never seen anything like this before. I'd better go and see about the *pants*." I went over to the pants and they were a hundred and eighty dollars. Finally they said, "Since you're from another place, our tax here for everything is eighty dollars."

I was still standing there trying to figure out whether I wanted the pants or the socks. Then I came back here. I wondered if I had paid on them they'd have been in the bed with me."

*Part of a lecture given by Sun Ra at Verna Gillis's Soundscape Club, New York, Dec. '79.*

# Queens of the Keyboard



Florence DeJongh

## An Interview with Florence DeJongh and Ena Baga

DEJONGH: I was the first woman to broadcast in this country with Alvar Liddell, at St. Georges Hall near Broadcasting House, London, in 1926. Ena was the last one to play it. It was bombed. I thought that was nice, two sisters, first and last.

BAGA: I couldn't understand it because everything in St. Georges Hall had been cancelled that day except my transmission which was supposed to go out at 10.20. I thought why should I go over there if no one else is, but the transmission had to go through because it hadn't been cancelled. When the spotters eventually came, my eldest sister and I rushed round to the BBC like hares — we couldn't go straight across because it had been blitzed and there were great lumps of masonry. When I got into the ballroom there was a jazz band doing a transmission and I thought why the devil can't I do my show here. Well, anyway, they put up a big curtain and we slept there that

In a film world produced and directed mainly by men, Florence DeJongh and her sister Ena Baga have both been highly successful as accompanists to silent films. The recent rediscovery of live accompaniment has shown just how popular and important these pianists are. Apart from the extra excitement and enthusiasm that a pre-recorded soundtrack can't quite conjure up they enable you to see a film in its original context.

night, men on one side and women on the other. And of course that night it was bombed and that was the end of St. Georges Hall.

### COMING INTO THE PICTURE

DEJONGH: I started at the age of 14. Our father was a very fine musician and he took over the first orchestra in London — the Angel Islington — belonging to the Davies family, very famous in the cinema world. I used to rush down from school, down the stairs to the stage door and listen to him. In the orchestra there was a little organ, like a small church organ.

One day I was sitting there listening to Dad and he said "Come on, I'm going to put you on the organ". I had to do what I was told — I was only 14. He said "Now I'm going to put you on some of Bach," so I had Bach — the most difficult music God ever created. How I got through it I don't know. And from then I started playing the organ.

We had two sisters who died. The first was a very famous pianist with Sir Henry Wood. She played in a theatre, which is now a cinema in Leicester Square. She used to go there of a night; she was the pianist with that famous woman Lily Elsie. The second act was a violinist. That necessitated

Celeste leaving half an hour before she was finished at the Cafe Royal, Regent Street. So 'this one' had to go and do the half hour. That's how I started coming into the picture.

We lived in Islington at the time and I used to go and play in the afternoons to silent films and then in the evening I had the opera (at Sadlers Wells). That went on for quite a while. Then I went to Terry's theatre, now Woolworths in the Strand. That was the only place I ever got the sack from in the whole of my 70 years playing. When I went upstairs they said "Yes, very nice, it'll be 15 shillings a week", a lot of money in those days, and asked me where I lived and how old I was. I said I was 15 and they said "Oh! We can't engage you we shall lose our licence." So I got the sack. Came home and told me Ma. She said "Why? Couldn't you play properly?" I said I played alright, they liked it, but they said I was too young. Well, after that there was a whole lot of different places.

During the First World War, I was 16, I went to the Finsbury Park Rink and played the organ there. That's how I came into the New Gallery because the owner sold the rink and asked me to open the New Gallery in Regent Street. During the war the rink was the most wonderful place for all these service people, the bands were always upstairs away from the skating.

Apart from that, I did quite a number of jobs. When the rink was sold I went back to Southend. We had our parents living there with Ena who was only a little one. She's nine years younger than me, she came when things were most unexpected, I was the baby of the family.

They sent for me in Southend and I opened up the New Gallery. I'd married the conductor who was with me in Finsbury Park and I said to my boss that I had a husband down in Southend, "Well", he said, "Bring him up here, he's a conductor down there let him be a conductor up here."

### GOLD, SILVER AND THE QUEEN MARY

I gave notice after 13 years. I met a nice young man (I was a widow by then), and he was building cinemas all over the country and putting in organs everywhere so I thought I'd better go and work for him. His cinemas are mostly bingo halls now. He went away to South Africa as a miner, rushed away from school because he said there was gold and silver in the mines. But he came back because his family were going into the film world. He built a number of cinemas in Belfast, the North of England, Bridgnorth, and he was one of the founder members of the Variety Club.

I used to do a funny lot of things in those days. My husband went to South Africa to build houses and that necessitated me staying six months with him, then back over here for another six months because we had cinemas here. But General Smuts died and Vorster came in who hated anything English. So he put an embargo on cement, an embargo on bricks — the whole thing went bust. That finished my husband, he'd always been successful, and he died two years later.

I came back and I met a man called Geraldo in Bond Street. I told him that I'd been in South Africa playing the organ and that it was about time I was on his Mary (the S.S. Queen Mary sailing from Liverpool to New York). He said, "I wish to heavens I could take you but they won't take women." So I gave him some things about me to take to Liverpool and I was on. Had to sign a year's contract, it was a marvellous job. Being in the film world I met

all the people who matter over there, they used to come with their huge Packard cars. I think I saw more of New York than the New Yorkers did. But it was a bit tiring, the Atlantic is a hell of a sea, so I phoned Ena (she was in Rhodesia) and said "Do you want to come and see New York," she said "Rather!", so she came and took over.

It was just as well it happened at that time because the musical director of the National Film Theatre phoned and asked me to help out. I knew him when I was a kid, he was the pianist with my first husband's orchestra. So I went to play a few silent films, like old times. Then he died and the National Film Theatre asked me to take over his job. That was 12 years ago and I've been there ever since. I do other work when I want to but that's the last job I expect I shall do, although my career's not finished yet. (Recently she has played at the Barbican.)

### YOU NAME IT AND I'VE DONE IT

BAGA: My first job was in Southend where I had to go for my health. I went to a very strict convent and it didn't agree with me. I played everywhere in Southend, including on the pier dressed as a Hussar. I was the church organist where Father was the choirmaster. Father wanted me to be a concert pianist. I worked very hard, practising and all that, but one day the local organist at the Noble cinema fell ill and they asked me to take his place. Of course the concert platform faded and I was a professional musician. But you name it and I've done it — I think I've done all facets of organ and piano playing.

### TRAVELLING IN THE JUNGLE WITH AN ORGAN

I travelled Rhodesia with an electronic organ because we had a friend there who had a big tobacco plant and wanted some entertainment. We were the first to take an organ into Rhodesia. I did a lot of one night stands there, but the distances and the dirt tracks got very tiring. They were building the Kariba Dam at the time and I had to go and entertain the workers. A fortnight before I went they had a great tragedy — 15 men fell into wet concrete — so they wanted something to take their minds off that.

I called it the 'Cement and Spaghetti Safari' — I've never seen so much of either! Eventually I went back to South Africa because the travelling and everything was a bit much.

When the Second World War started I was blitzed out of the Gaumont, Camden Town, and

then out of the BBC. So I was living on a twenty-seven and six airforce pay. There were no jobs in London so I auditioned in Blackpool and spent five years at the Tower, Blackpool. After the war I came back but there was nothing doing. Television was coming in, it was the death knell of the cinema. These friends were building hotels in South Africa so I went over there.

### TRAVELS TO TRIPOLI

When I got back there was a cable on the mat from a German agent asking me to go to Tripoli, the biggest American camp outside the USA. Well, I thought I don't want that, I've just come back. But when I realised that there was no work in London anymore I took it. When I got to Tripoli the customs saw some music in my case and wanted to know what it was and I said I was a musician going to play at the camp. Apparently some travelling singers had brought some Jewish records which they didn't like and they thought I was one of those.

But it was a marvellous experience there. They had everything you could think of — tenpin bowling alleys, two golf courses, restaurants galore, riding stables, the PX was an Aladdin's cave, and in the liquor mart you could get a Jeroboam of champagne for about £1.

While I was there they asked me to go back to this hotel in Durban. When I got back from there I went on the Queen Mary after Florence, and after that I was with Hammond organs. I was travelling with a Hammond organ in the jungle and the darned thing never gave me a moment's worry. I had no engineer, no spare valve, nothing. And it played beautifully the whole time. On the strength of that I was demonstrating for Hammond all over the British Isles and from there I went onto other electronics. I still go up to the dealers in the Midlands and the North and sell, and teach and play as well.

How do you set about accompanying a film? Is it completely improvised?

Well, that should be an interesting story for you because this is a dying art. You have to accumulate a library in your brain of various kinds of music. You play in the dark and whatever you have to portray, whether it's Russian films, Chinese films, German films, you've got to be able to do it. Last week I did *The Mountain Cat* starring Polo Legri which has a gypsy theme, so I drew upon all the old gypsy music and some Russian for it. I got very big applause. It's all from memory. When you get the synopses you get an idea of the film and you

have to improvise around the various themes, but it's got to be the right sort of music.

The three younger people who work for me at the National Film Theatre tend to improvise more, whereas I just draw on my memory of knowledge.

DEJONGH: But we play music. My director (Leslie Hardcastle) wanted me to teach young people, so I said let them come and listen. But many times when I look they're at the bar drinking. That's as far as we get. You see, when you've got a knowledge of music like we have, good memories run in the family, you don't need lines, all we need is a little light.

At this point the 'interview' ended and after they had entertained us on the piano we asked a few more questions:

Do you have any favourite films you like playing to?

BAGA: We like the Valentino and the Garbo.

DEJONGH: I started the Buster Keaton and tomorrow morning the owner of the Buster Keaton films is sending his rep here. I don't know what they want, probably to make tapes. But I've always stopped that. You see there are three men and my sister beside me and if I do that they're going to lose their jobs. So all the years I've played Buster Keaton I won't have a tape. I won't do a tape. But I think they think that I'm an old woman now and they had better get the talent on the tape.

BAGA: I did 50 films in Rotterdam last year because they are accumulating a library of films like the National Film Theatre — Laurel and Hardy, Eric Von Stroheim, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin — the lot. But they can't show these films unless they have a fitting for them. So from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon I was recording. It was damned hard work but interesting. I certainly earned my fee.

Were there a lot of women accompanying films at the time?

BAGA: No, I think we're rather unique. It was mostly one or two of the older men that used to play in the cinemas.

DEJONGH: The only time I realised that I was not in favour with a man was when I had the most coveted job in England — the New Gallery — and on the opening night not one man came up to congratulate me.

It's had its complications, but I think I've done the right thing.○



In a hula heaven



## The Story of the Hawaiian Guitar

by Mark Brisenden

Additional material by David Toop.



For centuries the music of Hawaii was a close-kept secret, hidden from the rest of the world despite a dominance over Hawaiian Island politics by naturalised invaders from America, France and England. This cultural obscurity was catapulted into the modern world by the annexation of the Islands by the U.S.A. in 1898. For the next 50 years, Hawaiian — particularly music — came to dominate American popular culture, from there diffusing onwards throughout the world with an influence that ranged from the absurd and the exotic to one of the major music revolutions of this century. Whether they know it or not, any musician using an electric guitar, a steel guitar or an open tuning has Hawaii in their blood.

The first Hawaiians were ancient Polynesians who probably made their way to the islands in the 5th or 6th century. Their music up until the late 18th century was almost entirely percussive with the exception of the ukelele (strips of plant fibre stretched across a piece of bowed wood and plucked) but in 1778 Captain Cook's arrival set a bizarre chain of events in motion resulting in the bringing of the guitar to Hawaii. Cook's midshipman of the time, George Vancouver, returned to Hawaii in 1793 as Captain, bringing with him a gift of several head of cattle for the King. Under the privilege of a royal protection which made it illegal to slaughter the cows they multiplied to a problematic extent (after all, the Hawaiians had no knowledge of ranching). In 1830 the King's son visited California, still part of Spanish Mexico, and witnessed the skills of the Spanish gauchos. Knowing a solution to a problem when he saw one he arranged for a group of these gauchos to visit Hawaii to teach the islanders how to herd cattle.

#### HOME ON THE RANGE

The Gauchos exported their guitars along with their cowboy abilities and in true home-on-the-range style would play at nights after a day spent herding. When they left, some of their guitars stayed behind and the awed Hawaiians set about learning the instrument.

The Hawaiians possessed a long tradition of songs and chants to accompany the Hula dances (originally sacred ceremonials not to be confused with the modern tourist amusement of sashaying pretty girls). The rhythm and spirit was there but the guitars had to be tuned. They probably did this by tuning the six strings on the guitar in relation to one another — the result probably a

major chord corresponding to the most comfortable reference note in the player's singing voice. Guitarists today know this as *open tuning*, but the Hawaiians called it *Ki Ho Alu* or *Slack Key* (because of the slackening or tuning down of some or, maybe all of the strings). The guitarist could then press one finger down over all six strings and play major chords anywhere on the neck with just one position.

For about 70 years slack key spread throughout the islands with increasing complexity of style and technique. Its domination over guitar playing was complete until a Hawaiian schoolboy on Oahu started playing in a style that generated unimaginable consequences.

#### THE BIRTH OF STEEL GUITAR

According to legend the schoolboy — Joseph Kekuku — started to play his guitar by laying it in his lap and barring the strings with a comb to get a sliding sound. He soon found, however, that a penknife produced better results — results unique enough to cause a sensation which placed Hawaii onto the known musical map in a big way with the birth of the steel guitar.

With the American annexation of Hawaii in 1898, a whole new market opened up — Americans were completely infatuated with this exotic new sound. As early as 1911 Hawaiian performers were touring American theatres and Vaudeville Halls, often as quartets of steel guitar, rhythm guitar, ukelele and bass. Their burgeoning popularity was reflected by the desire of record companies to pump out anything Hawaiian. Tin Pan Alley geared its production line to the craze and the guitar companies of the day started offering Hawaiian accessories with their instruments — a raised nut at the head end of the neck which prevented the steel bar now used for fretting from rattling on the fingerboard; the steel bar itself and, in some cases, correspondence course Hawaiian guitar lessons.

#### SONG OF THE ISLANDS

Up until about 1927 the early Hawaiian stars played small-bodied acoustic guitars flat in their laps — the Martin Hawaiian Koawood guitar was a great favourite. Frank Ferera (a Portuguese cowboy who had settled in Hawaii), Sol Hoopii and Jim and Bob, otherwise known as the Genial Hawaiians, were the best exponents of this style. Ferera was a prolific recording and touring artist. Hoopii, on the other hand, was a popular nightclub act who also did soundtracks for



# In a hula heaven



Cliff Carlisle — pioneer of Hawaiian guitar in country music

Hollywood South Seas movies such as *Waikiki Wedding* (starring that well known Hawaiian Bing Crosby) and *Song of the Islands* with Betty Grable as the song. No doubt Hoopii's soundtracks were the redeeming feature of the films. Jim and Bob had a regular slot on a Chicago radio station singing and playing Hawaiian and popular tunes in return for plugging their sponsor's wares.

## THE RESOPHONIC GUITAR

In the late '20s the Dopyera Brothers, three California-resident banjo makers working under the name National, developed the resophonic guitar. This incorporated metal resonators in the guitar body — in effect, non-electric amplification. Some early models were made entirely of metal. Due to disagreements between the Dopyera brothers and their partners in National the Dopers walked out and formed their own rival company. This meant that two similar models were in production — one called National steel, the other Dobro. Musicians, though, generally referred to them as Dobro's regardless of who manufactured them and the name has become synonymous with the

acoustic steel guitar. These guitars were a great success with the Hawaiian players and, indeed, were used exclusively up until the war when production halted due to the metal shortage. The top professionals of the day endorsed them and even movie star Ramon Navarro appeared playing one in an early Dobro catalogue.

## HILLBILLY BOOGIE BLUES

The Hawaiian craze finally faded in the early '40s. Metal was being made into weapons, vinyl was short, Tin Pan Alley and Hollywood had turned their attention to the war 'market' and the national mood was no longer in tune with the exotica of the Hawaiian sound. The steel guitar, on the other hand, was flourishing.

Many American musicians saw the potential of the Hawaiian style and adapted its sliding chords, piercing single string melodies and clear harmonics to their own music. The Dobro was gradually integrated into hillbilly groups and solo country blues players like Bukka White, Son House and Blind Boy Fuller developed powerfully individual and expressive techniques by using a metal tube or glass bottleneck instead of

a solid steel. Their method also involved bringing the guitar back up into its conventional position rather than flat on the lap. By placing the bottleneck on the third or fourth finger of their fretting hand they could use the other fingers to form chord shapes in the normal way.

## THE ELECTRIC REVOLUTION

By far the greatest influence on popular music worldwide, though, was the development of the electric guitar. Once again, somewhere close to the root of it was the Hawaiian sound. When three employees of the National company got together to form their own outfit, the Electro String Company, their experiments with instrument pickups were saved from economic disaster by Hawaiian music. George Beauchamp, Paul Barth and Adolph Rickenbacker produced the first commercial electric guitars in 1931 — ugly looking round-bodied lap steels known as 'frying pans'. It's difficult to imagine now that there would be resistance to the idea but as George Beauchamp tells the story feelings about electric guitars were very different in the '20s:

Still we could not get anyone to play the electric guitar. After two years of hard work, and spending nearly \$150,000, we were ready to admit we'd had it.

\* \* \* \*

At last we got a break. A very fine young Hawaiian boy, a wonderful steel player, ordered a guitar. He said he had a job on a radio station — and this order was a real break for us. In a few days every Hawaiian

and hillbilly in the city was on our trail. They lined up in front of the shop every morning to pick up all that we could produce the day before.

\* \* \* \*

Then the orchestras started to use our guitars. One morning we received an order from a large Chicago firm for 500 complete units. From then on, the orders came in from all over the world. We just could not believe what was happening.

(from 'The Rickenbacker' by Adolph Rickenbacker, reprinted in *The Guitar Player Book*, published by Grove Press).

Whilst the Hawaiians transferred their distinctive style from acoustic to electric, enjoying the versatility and extra volume offered by the new technology, the hillbillies tore into the possibilities with an invention and enthusiasm that can still be felt by listening to the Western Swing records of the time. Between 1935 and the early '50s, Leon McAuliffe, the dazzling steel guitarist for Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, had moved from using a single neck steel (changing guitars for different tunings) to using a Fender four neck guitar with one neck reserved solely for special effects. The development of the pedal steel (one or more necks mounted on a stand with foot pedals and knee levers to alter tuning during playing) was the final step in the direction of the 'crying' steel which characterises virtually all modern country records.

The blues players also made their mark on electric slide playing, though a few years after the country and Hawaiian players,

A Genial Hawaiian



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## The Dobro model 60 from 1931

Following the example of the country blues singers they preferred to play the guitar in its conventional position and so had to wait for the commercial marketing of an electric guitar based on the normal model. In the hands of Chicago musicians like Muddy Waters and Elmore James the slide guitar exemplified '50s urban blues — loud, intense and overpoweringly emotional. Elmore James even had a hit with a slide guitar piece called 'Hawaiian Boogie Parts One and Two'! As for the Dobro, one of the main catalysts for all this feverish activity, its use as a slide guitar was made virtually redundant; it took the folk revival of the early '60s to bring it back into the limelight, 'though this time as a bluegrass instrument.

## PARADISE STEELIES

The international influence of these developments was enormous, of course, but the early Hawaiian troupes also made a great impression, particularly through tours to Europe. They left behind them little pockets of enthusiasts obviously entranced by a sound and lifestyle so exotic and fantastically remote that Hawaii became the image of utopia. The sun always shone, the music never stopped and nothing was ever allowed to bother anybody. A grapevine of Hawaiian steel guitar players or *steelies*, as they like to call themselves, took root throughout Europe and, through specialist

magazines and appreciation societies, spread to many other parts of the world.

## HAWAIIAN CHRISTMAS

Hawaiian-style musicians to emerge from these pockets included British born Bern Causley who, for many years before his death, played summer seasons with his own Hawaiian trio in that most exotic of locations — the Isle of Wight! He is thought by some to have invented a pedal steel guitar that anteceded the American models.

In Hawaiian-style guitarist Wout Steenhuis there is a definite case of coals to Newcastle for his music reaps worldwide acclaim and popularity but is just Hawaiian-style easy listening. His records rejoice in titles like *Wout Steenhuis Hawaiian Paradise* and *Wout Steenhuis Hawaiian Christmas* (he's Dutch, by the way) featuring versions of "Winter Wonderland" and 'Silent Night'. You can find these records in branches of Boots, W.H. Smith and Woolworth. They come in vast quantities and very, very cheap. Incredibly, Steenhuis also plays hotels and tourist resorts in Hawaii itself. More music in a Hawaiian vein, but with a definite eclectic bent, comes from oddballs Martin Denny and Arthur Lyman who mix Hawaiian-flavoured music with Latin, Chinese, Japanese influences and percussive effects. Denny and Lyman also play regularly in Hawaii.

## THE SURROGATE KITHARA

The Hawaiian influence has not just been confined to popular music either — the late Harry Partch, composer, theorist and musical instrument maker extraordinaire, invented the weird (and sometimes wonderful) Surrogate Kithara partly in response to the problems of producing music in just intonation on the guitar (an instrument limited by its frets to the European musical system of dividing the octave into 12 semitones). The Surrogate Kithara is a double lap steel-like instrument, played with a weighted plastic rod to produce a sliding sound that easily parallels the Hawaiian sound (though Partch was scathing about commercial Hawaiian music: 'the obnoxity of this tonal manipulation to some musically ears is due, I am convinced, more to the sugary and pseudo-South Seas music given to the instrument than to any ugliness or sentimentalism in the gliding sound as such.')

## SLACK KEY

The astonishing thing is that Hawaiian Slack Key, the original art, remained untouched, never crossing to the American mainland in the same way that steel guitar did. Traditional Hawaiian guitar musicians like Gabby Pihinui and Atta Isaacs along with

Joseph 'Kalei' Marshall, David Rogers and Eddie Kamae (who sometimes play together as the Sons of Hawaii) have been playing for the past 30 years using instruments such as tiples (10 string tenor guitar) and ukuleles as well as lap steels for accompaniment. Alice Namakel has been playing guitar since the early part of the century and has made records of old fashioned Slack Key guitar and old songs of Hawaii.

Slack Key can be distinguished by the fact that it has virtually no syncopation. The effect of this when Hawaiian music first caught on in America was a head-on collision — America took the sound and style and the Hawaiians adapted to the rhythmic syncopation inherent in Ragtime (playing tunes like 'Twelfth Street Rag' and 'St. Louis Blues'). Today there is still little western-style syncopation in traditional Hawaiian music, especially Slack Key. It has remained largely untouched by foreign influence despite the global spread of its offspring.

All this seems to matter very little to Slack Key. It is an indigenous island form that started in Hawaii, grew in Hawaii and apparently will continue there. There are many young players in the islands today and the Hawaiian Music Foundation has opened a music school which encourages local young children to take up the art.





by Steven Harvey

*Rhythm is sound blending together with a beat — Rene Scroggins*

In recent dance music one observes the ascendancy of the rhythm section. The minimalist funk of ESG embodies this idea of rhythm as message. Like punk in its infancy, ESG make the simplicity of their playing into a strength. Like much recent disco, they realize that the cornerstone of danceable music is the percussion and bass break. The three songs on their new 99 12" — "The Beat", "Moody", "Dance" use concise, self-referential lyrics as the vehicle for lead singer Rene Scroggins' teasingly mixed-back, metallic vocals. In contrast to the xerox mentality of much recent disco, their sound is always distinctly individual. While texturally, they resemble the spartan white funk of groups like A Certain Ratio, ESG possess two qualities intrinsic to great dance music — memorable tunes and soulful vocals.

On a cool, grey November Sunday I board a subway for the South Bronx. As the train passes through the Grand Concourse station it rises into the air on one of the raised El platforms that criss-cross the Bronx. Waiting for me at the bottom of the metal steps at the station is Deborah, the bassist from ESG. She is shy and pretty, dressed in a leather jacket, her hair up in a topknot. She leads me past playgrounds and garages to the highrise project where her family, The Scroggins, live. The four Scroggins daughters, along with their friend Tito, make up ESG (short for Emerald, Sapphire and Gold).

## WKTU

Their apartment is a mixture of neat domesticity and functional creativity. The walls of the hallway are lined with amplifiers. Plastic slipcovered couches share space with a full set of chrome plate drums in the living room. A couple of turntables and a mixer rest on a cabinet. The radio is set to the 'urban contemporary' dance music of WKTU. ESG have always rehearsed in their living room.

Twenty three year old, Rene, the spokesperson for the group has given birth to a baby girl several weeks before. An easy laugh punctuates her statements. The Scroggins are not as they appear, Latin. Their father is English and Irish and their mother a mixture of Black and Indian. In fact only Tito is Puerto Rican.

## FIRST, BEST AND WORST CRITIC

ESG began around 10 years ago when their mother, Helen introduced her daughters to music. Rene:

'My mother didn't want us hanging out on the street, so she bought us some instruments. I was 13, Deborah had to be every bit of seven or eight years old, and she was playing the bass. She used to complain that it was bigger than her. Our mother used to sing in a church choir. She was always trying to direct our voices — to help us arrange the harmonies. She would hear us and say if something was missing. To this day she's our first, best and worst critic. She tells you the truth.'

Their father had been a jazz saxophonist, and Rene recalls with enjoyment hearing the records of Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and others around the house.

'We used to watch those TV shows about music, *Rock Concert* and *Soul Train*. I'd say, "I can do that!" Then you get your instruments and find out it isn't so easy to do. We used to copy other peoples' records but that didn't work because it didn't sound like it. We decided we were going to do our own songs.'

## TOO ROUGH

They started out performing in local community centers and at talent shows. I wondered if before they had hooked up with Ed Bahlman and 99, they had played any of the local clubs in the Bronx. Rene said that they really didn't like the local clubs — too rough and...

'In the Bronx, unless you're on the radio, or you're somebody — you're nobody. In the club scene (downtown) they're more open to new things.' Deborah concurs — 'Up here they get the news last!'

Lately, with rapping and b-boy music doesn't much of the most creative music originate in the Bronx?

'The reason they liked that was because it was vulgar, (laughter) It was vulgarhood, so it was hip.'

Ed Bahlman of 99, has one of the best independent record stores in the city. The main criteria of his label, whose releases have ranged from Glenn Branca to Adrian Sherwood's Singers & Players, seems to be sonic originality and musical intelligence. He first encountered ESG while judging a band competition, and was

# ESG \* the fa



Whose photo graced the opening page of *Collusion's* first issue back in summer '81? Why, the Scroggins family with their friend Tito, otherwise known as New York's punk-funkers, ESG. Steven Harvey interviews ESG in their Bronx home and discovers an interest in Barry Manilow.

struck by the group's insistence on performing only original material. He began to advise them, informally at first, and this led to the group's first downtown performance, at the Pop Front, a shortlived attempt by a collective of independent music aficionados to present music in a context equitable for both musicians and audience. Rene:

'It was so surprising. We'd never played before a punk-rock audience, so we didn't know what to expect. The band that opened were wild. We'd never heard that

kind of music. We were just looking around, the whole experience, the people, the hair colors . . . I said, "What are they going to do when we get up there and play some funk?"' (ESG ended up doing three encores)

## MOODY

While many local bands continue to shuffle back and forth between the city's few alternative music venues, Bahlman has consistently netted ESG important gigs. This

# The family jewels



photo by Kristine Larsen

summer they played to their biggest audience yet, several thousand, opening for The Clash at The Pier. They'd previously opened for The Clash at the ill-fated Bonds fiasco on the same night that a rowdy and uncomprehending audience of Clash fans had pelted Grand Master Flash and The Furious 5 with cups and debris. Recently they flew out to California to open for Public Image and managed to win over PIL's California punk audience.

Their first EP, a Factory/99 collaboration, featured a live set, recorded by Bahlman on cassette directly off the board at Hurrah, and a studio set produced by Martin Hannett. The recording session with Hannett was perfunctory — the songs were all cut in one take, after which Hannett took the songs back to England

to mix. Nonetheless, the EP yielded two songs "Moody" and "You're No Good" which became underground hits in progressive discos like The Paradise Garage. The Garage is the new plus ultra of NY discos. A members only, primarily black and gay club, it is packed with fanatic dancers from two 'til ten am. What gets played by DJ Larry Levan is a good barometer of what one will eventually hear on dance music radio. The rebirth of interest in Eddy Grant was prompted by his consistent popularity in clubs like the Garage and such is the case with ESG. Levan still plays "Moody" regularly and ESG have performed there twice. The first time on New Years Eve and more recently at Levan's Birthday Party along with the Peech Boys and Two Tons of Fun. ESG and

## Rene likes:

**Songwriters**  
Barry Manilow — for *It Could be Magic*  
Burt Bacharach & Carole Bayer Sager — for *Arthur's Theme*  
Christopher Cross — *Sailing*

## Singers

Barbra Streisand  
Aretha Franklin  
Diana Ross (with the Supremes)  
(when I mentioned to Rene that she reminded me of early Diana, in the way her voice sounds like a horn she said, 'I think the voice is an instrument. I use it as an instrument to fill out spaces in the song.')



Bahlman convinced the management to allow them to play live, rather than with the taped instrumental 'TV tracks' that are customary for disco performances. Rene is adamant in her preference to playing live rather than with tapes.

"I think that audiences like it better live, anywhere, because with the tapes, it's just like hearing the record. The thing is, with tapes you can't do anything exciting. Just like Two Tons Of Fun at The Garage, when they were singing you could feel that they wanted to extend it, and stretch it, but the tapes were preprogrammed."

Seeing ESG perform at The Garage is markedly different from hearing them at rock clubs. They play to a rabidly partisan audience who bark and hoot their approval. Michael DeBenedictus, producer of The Peech Boys, along with Levan has given them a song called "It's a Pleasure To Serve You" which he hopes to produce with them.

## MASTER-MIX STYLE

Picking up airplay on disco (as well as college) radio the group went into the studio and re-recorded "Moody" along with two new tracks. The three songs give a nod to the popular mastermix style, with the delayed clicks on "The Beat" and the buzzing overtones and strange one note horn break (actually Rene's voice put through a filter) on "Moody".

In the can, is an album of 10 or 12 songs with yet a third different version of "Moody" which Rene professes to like best of all.

I asked Rene how growing up here in the Bronx had influenced her music and if she still enjoyed living here?

"Living up here, at first it was nice but it's really deteriorated. The Bronx can give you a lot of musical feeling because there's so

much stuff going on out there. It has a lot of savage drive, with the drum beats and all. The whole summer long all you hear from sunrise to sunset is congas in the park back there. It can drive you crazy. You begin to get used to it like a bird. Every time you go out, it's a fight for your life, I'm not lying, it's savage out there. I'd like to move from The Bronx, some place peaceful where you don't have to worry about being killed."

How do they write their songs?

The drummer and the bass-player usually make the music and then I come in to arrange it and put some words into it. When we write the lyrics, we keep it simple so that you can learn the song and sing along to it.'

What kind of ambitions do they have?

"We're going to see how far we can take the music, but also everybody is doing something on the side. I've been going to college, Deborah's studying accounting. You've got to have something else planned. With the music, if you can express something different and take it as far as it will go, then somebody else will come up and do something different because music is so boring when it's the same."

## PUNK FUNK

Finally, I wondered how they would classify their music?

"I don't feel like a disco group, I don't feel like a punk group, I feel like a funk group, maybe like Rick James says, punk-funk. I feel we're right here, in between, we've got something for everybody. This reporter asked me if I felt different playing for my black audience and my white audience. I sat there looking at this guy, I said, 'It doesn't matter what color the people are, music is not color. It's a sound, it's a feeling. If you feel it, you feel it.'"



# What a difference a gay makes

by Chris Kirk



The late '50s. Sunday lunch. Roast beef and boredom and Two-Way Family Favourites blaring away on the wireless in the corner. I was nine, too young even to know what homosexuality was. But precocious — or devious — enough to get a sudden inexplicable buzz out of hearing the Everly Brothers crooning a love song to each other. 'Whenever I want you, all I have to do is dream'. If there'd been a Top of the Pops in those days I'd have fully expected Don and Phil to perform the song sitting on high stools, holding hands and gazing into each other's eyes. Boys in love! I was astonished that my family, arguing over the Yorkshire pudding, was totally ignorant of this wonderfully

wicked intrusion, this onslaught on everything that I knew we were meant to hold dear. Looking back, it was my first real experience of the subversive. The taste lingers still. Thank you, Jean Metcalfe.

## WHENEVER I WANT YOU

I soon learnt about the conventions of duetting, and was bitterly disappointed, of course. But the Eys had sown a seed which, by the time I'd decided I was gay at 14, was becoming a full-blown obsession. Collecting gay pop records became a grand passion for a decade and a half. Quality was never a criterion, nor was the sexuality of the performer. My only rule of thumb was that a song lyric should have at least one reference to a gay situation or character — however

Records with gay subject matter are now fairly commonplace. Not so long ago you needed ears like a fox and eyes like a hawk to spot them. Chris Kirk unearths some gay rarities and explains why a grand passion has cooled.

peripheral, ambiguous or politically unsound. The result of this very early ghetto mentality of mine is that I'm sitting on one or two classics and some of the tackiest records ever made.

## NO-ONE CAN SEE THEM

There's never been a shortage of faggots in rock 'n' roll from Little Richard on, but it's only recently — after the spadework of Bowie, Tom Robinson, Elton John — that it's become commonplace for people like Boy George and Sylvester to readily admit that they like going to bed with other men. Even now, we still await a major female recording artist's coming out.

In his dreadful but immensely readable paperback *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*, Simon Napier Bell has recently blown the gaff about the pop music casting couches of the '60s. 'It was surprising that an industry generating so many millions of pounds was prepared to use little more than the manager's sexual tastes as its yardstick of talent. Most of the managers were men and most of them liked boys.' But at the time only the cognoscenti were aware and recorded product was relentlessly heterosexual. Eden Kane singing that "Boys Cry" (when no one can see them) was about the limit anyone reached in questioning the rigidity of sex roles!

## ► DISCREET REFERENCES

From the mid '60s on, with the first whiff of civil rights in the air and the semi-legalization in this country of male gay sex acts, homosexuality began to lose its air of being a dank little secret that nobody talked about. But in music, any references were so discreetly understated that they inevitably shaded into the completely ambiguous. Jody Miller's "Home of the Brave" (1965) only has gay relevance by default. But, judging by the number of gay people I know who possess this rather obscure single, it touched a nerve somewhere. On the surface it's a common-or-garden protest song castigating the hypocrisy and intolerance of Middle America. A WASP boy is sent home by the school board, who will not tolerate his long hair and his 'funny clothes'. Miller's angst-ridden delivery drops the hint that there's more here than meets the eye. The other kids, she whines, are cruel:

'More than once he's gone home with a bloody nose... He's not like them and they can't ignore it, So they all hate him for it'.

The ironic refrain 'Home of the brave, Land of the free/Why won't you let him be what he wants to be?' seemed to sum up the beginnings of a change in consciousness towards gays. Pariah becomes victim. I guess it was preferable to being ignored.

## CHART FLUTTERINGS

Otherwise there were very slim pickings indeed in this secret

orchard of mine. The only other record to cause a flutter of excitement in those days was "I'll Try For The Sun", a track from Donovan's UK top ten EP, *The Universal Soldier*. A sassy little paean of love to a gypsy boy, it includes the classic lines:

'And who's going to be the one  
Who says it was no good, what  
we done?  
I dare a man to say I'm too  
young...!'

No doubt Donovan was only continuing the folk tradition of singing a song written for a woman without altering the gender of the lyrics. But even today it sounds very gay to these ears.

## SMIRKING ALLUSIONS

By 1967, Scott Walker was beginning to have hits with songs by Jacques Brel. Brel is the Genet of popular music, his universe populated by sailors, pimps, whores and 'queers' — all rotting teeth and gonorrhoea, creatures rather than people. "Jackie" is the reverie of an ageing heterosexual pimp and Walker's version, with its reference to 'authentic queers and phoney virgins' has the distinction of being the first UK Top 20 record to actually (gasp!) mention homosexuals.

Walker later covered many of Brel's songs of gay relevance, which perhaps encouraged the *New Musical Express*'s Alley Cat to start a bitching campaign about the singer's friendship with Jonathan King. Asking ingenuous questions every

week like 'Does Jonathan eat Scott's porridge every day?' and 'Does Scott Walker smoke King-sized cigarettes?', the Cat's smirking was a measure of the embarrassment that people still felt about the subject at that time. And perhaps the bitching had some effect: you'll find, tucked away on the B-side of a 1971 Jonathan King single a song called "I Don't Want To Be Gay".

## SEAT SQUIRMING

Attitudes to personal relationships began to change noticeably with the advent of dope and acid. The hippies' delight, Jefferson Airplane, recorded a Dave Crosby song called "Triad" in 1968. It's a re-working of the old 'which boy to choose' conundrum, only this time singer Grace Slick refuses to choose between:

'Me and him or you and me.  
I don't really see  
Why can't we go on as three?'

The message is 'break all the rules', and not only with regard to monogamy. Same-sex love is a natural concomitant too:

'Sister-lovers, water-brothers,  
And in time — maybe others'.

## ENGLISH AMBIGUITY

The same year, the musical *Hair* was breaking every convention imaginable and the number most guaranteed to have a respectable

audience squirming in their seats was, "Sodomy", in which Woof — a gay character — extols the wonders of sodomy, fellatio, cunnilingus and pederasty. Things were changing.

Curiously, British bands seemed far more interested in ambiguity, androgyny and transvestism (TV). By 1966 the Who had already released "I'm A Boy", the gender identity crisis song par excellence. The Pink Floyd's "Arnold Layne" was about a cross-dresser. And a couple of years later came the Kinks' "Lola".

Throughout the late '60s and '70s, the Kinks consistently presented their public with unsterotypical and often sympathetic portraits of gays and TV's. Ray Davies' forte is teasing ambiguity — 'girls will be boys and boys will be girls' — and the whole point of *Lola* is that the audience never really learns whether the naive hero succumbs to the charms of the delectable and admirably well-adjusted TV.

"(Wish I could be like) David Watts" — recorded in 1967, but never a Kinks single — is on the surface merely a portrait of hero-worship. But the feelings of the self-deprecating 'dull and simple lad' are more than platonic for 'gay and fancy free' David who we learn, isn't interested in his female admirers. Hope springs eternal in the narrator's breast: the final clue is a wilfully and skillfully ambiguous double-



# What a difference a gay makes



entendre, with our dullard sighing 'I wish that his body belonged to me'. Few of us have been lucky enough to escape the miseries of calf-love and the plight of this spotty creature causes an awful shock of self-recognition. And you'll find plenty more gay references by plundering the Kink's Kanon, particularly on the *Sleep-walker* and *Misfits* albums.

## AMERICAN EXPLOSIONS

In the States, the Velvet Underground — formed by Andy Warhol — was making music which told what it was like to be a hustler, a transvestite, a masochist, a junkie. The material was too explosive to be heard on UK radio but word was out that barriers were coming down. Here, the dam broke with Bowie. His first overtly gay record was "Width of a Circle" from *Man Who Sold the World*, which tells of an encounter in the underworld with a god whose 'tongue is swollen with devil's love'. It's a disturbing picture of a Nietzschean superman subjugating and probably raping the narrator. But it marked the end of the period when you needed to closely read lyrics to find gay references in pop. "Queen Bitch", "Jean Genie", "John, I'm Only Dancing", "Rebel, Rebel", "Boys Keep Swinging" helped bring in their train gay songs from some of Bowie's peers like Elton John ("Daniel" is palpably gay; "All the girls love Alice" is palpably anti-lesbian; the risqué "Big Dipper" is literally stuffed with innuendo), Lou Reed (see "Walk on the Wild Side" and "Make-up" from *Transformer*, "The Kids" from *Berlin*, etc) and Rod Stewart whose migraine-inducing "Killing of Georgie" made number one. Lesser luminaries like glam-rockers Jobriath and Starbuck, plus Peter Straker, Tim Curry and Steve Swindells managed *not* to make a career from singing about things explicitly gay.

It seems the party's over now for Tom Robinson, but he's said again recently that the one record he still feels proud about is "Glad to be Gay". I wish I could agree. Though I'll readily admit that the record was a trail-blazer, hearing it always depresses me into the ground. And not only because of the often-ignored ironic lyrics. I can't bear it because it's so bloody butch, like a football chant for gays. To my mind he's made much better records since his fall from grace, like the upbeat, giggly and very gay "Never Gonna Fall In Love Again" (co-written with Elton John). But when John recorded it he altered the lyrics to

make it heterosexual) and his recent LP, *North By Northwest* — a musically interesting, lyrically revealing collection of songs about loneliness, alienation, coping with failure.

## JOAN, JOAN, DORY AND DUSTY

In mainstream music, lesbian and bisexual women performers have, in general, chosen to be non-gender specific in their love songs.



Pete Shelley

Strangely there are any number of examples of women who sing about male homosexuals; look at Joan Baez's "Altar Boy and the Thief", Joan Armatrading's "Rosie", Nina Hagen's "If I was a Boy", Noosa Fox's "Georgina Bailey", Dory Previn's "Michael, Michael", Patti Smith's "Gloria", Dusty Springfield's "Closet Man", Lynsey de Appalling's "Getting a Drag", Suzi Quatro's "Mama's Boy" and — particularly — Kate Bush's "Wow" and "Kashmir from Baghdad".

But, apart from Gina X's "No GDM" (dedicated to Quentin Crisp and in which Gina describes herself as a lesbian) the only commercial/mainstream recordings by women that I've heard which manifestly concern themselves with the subject of relations between women are three exquisite love songs, all tucked away as album tracks: "Lady Madelaine" by Marianne Faithfull; "Emmie" by Laura Nyro and "Maria" by Janis Ian. If you want to stretch things, add a couple of Joan Armatrading observations in the songs "Back to the Night" and "Me, Myself, I". Independent women's labels are another matter, of course, and I wouldn't presume to pretend that I'm an authority on, for instance, Olivia or Redwood Records.

If you're beginning to get the impression that most gay-oriented music over the years has been of a fairly high standard, let me disillusion you. Much of it has been unspeakably awful. For those of you with a passion for kitsch, there's one absolute monstrosity that I'd urge you to seek out. Written and performed by the dreaded Rod McKuen, "Black Eagle" (on DJM) wins my personal Gold Turkey Award hands down. As the singer sleeps, a black eagle, 'chained in leather', takes him



phot by Chris Kirk

against his will. He awakes to find a black feather on his pillow and entreats God to rid him of this 'vile thing'. But the eagle returns, takes him to the woods and 'devours (him) as a lover would'.

McKuen, a born-again Christian, obviously has great guilts about certain sexual desires, and he yelps and howls his self-hate and anguish as only a bad poet who is tone-deaf could. A five-star classic. Buy at your peril.

With *Record Mirror* now running a Gay Disco Chart, I can hardly deny that the tacky end of disco is the genre most associated with gay men. And if at the moment there's any one outfit particularly associated with gay disco, it's the Boystown Yawn. Just as the Village People denied their gay origins after they'd hit it big with "YMCA", no doubt the Boys-towners would now choose to forget their LP version of "Cruisin' the Streets". It comes in a very close second in my personal god-awfulness stakes. The grunts and groans of two studs 'making out' on the street to the delighted squeals of a voyeuristic (female) hooker are interrupted by the arrival of two cops who teach 'the faggots' a lesson by screwing them against the nearest wall. Next to this record, Hilda Ogden's living room looks tasteful.

As to the third stinker to make up this triumvirate of trash, I'll admit I'm spoilt for choice. So let me steer those of you who are interested towards a few random humdinger. If you're mawkishly inclined, try Charles Aznavour's "What Makes a Man a Man?" or "All the Sad Young Men" by Shirley Bassey. Music to commit suicide to. You want a half-baked plea for tolerance dressed in mid-'70s disco bounce? Look out for Valentino's "I Was Born This Way" (on the Gaiee label, licensed by Motown). How about a comedy record that isn't at all funny? "Are You Being Served" by John Inman is just for you. On a record about bitchery that falls flat on its unsophisticated face? Look out for Steve Elgin's "Don't Leave Your Lover Lying Around, Dear". And worth its weight in gold as a record made by gays for gays is "Stand Together" on Deviant Records. The group (or collective) isn't named on the label — a wise move. Despite its obvious good intentions as a rallying-call to gays it sounds distinctly like a parody of "Tomorrow Belongs To Me", the Hitler Youth song from *Cabaret*.

As the number of gay and gay-oriented releases increases, I find I'm less and less interested. That's partly because the thrill of the hunt has gone and those records no longer seem subversive. It's also because I'm becoming increasingly suspicious of that part of myself that stands for ghetto mentality; the ambi/multi sexuality of bands like Culture Club, Soft Cell and Bow Wow Wow feels like a much healthier development than the cul-de-sac of separatism. Besides, I'm convinced I've found the consummate pop single. It's the (Radio One-banned) 12-inch version of "Homo Sapiens" by Pete Shelley and it says everything — musically and lyrically — that I ever hoped to hear in a gay pop record. Barring a miracle, things will never be the same again. ○

An article of this length could not hope to be comprehensive. Artists not covered here who have recorded gay or gay-related material include: Lewis Furey (Canadian. Brilliant Albums available on import only); Sylvester (out-gay, but his stunning version of "Lover Man" leaves out the important word 'man'); Kokomo ("Angel"); Peter Allen; Culture Club; Randy Newman; William Burroughs, etc.

Singles to look out for: "Johnny Are You Queer?" by Josie Cotton (on Bomp International. Very Toni Basil); Ian Matthews' constantly reissued "Da Doo Ron Ron". In this version Bill's gender remains intact; "Over the Wall We Go" by Oscar (aka Paul Nicholas, song written by David Bowie); and a lesbian version of "Je T'Aime" by Butterfly (import, label unknown or forgotten) etc. ● ● ● ● ●

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Illustration by Kieran Phelps



# EXECUTIVE ACTION

by Leon Thorne

For anyone who's been space travelling with Sun Ra for the past three years and hasn't noticed, we are in a recession. Companies are going bust, the dole queue is past the three million mark, profits have been hit etc., etc. Not least of the industries affected has been the music business, and EMI in particular. By the '80s, the once giant of the British music scene was near to going bust. In 1980, it was forced to merge with the electrical hardware multinational Thorn, and to embark on a 'rationalization' programme; factories were closed down and 28,200 workers were sacked in two months.

At the same time, Thorn/EMI launched a publicity campaign against home taping, blaming this for much of its lost profits and pressing the government to change the law and to produce untapeable records and cassettes. In other words, according to Thorn/EMI, the fault for its losses are its workers for being unproductive and the consumers for 'stealing' its income. A closer examination of EMI, however, reveals quite a different story and one that could be seen as a symbol for British industry as a whole. A story not of lazy workers and cheating consumers but of bad management and wrong investment decisions.

## LARGELY EXTINCT VOLCANOES

In 1970 EMI held 31% of the UK album market; by 1979 it was down to 21% and this in a declining market. By 1979, Ian Cole of the stockbroking firm James Capel, announced: "EMI is not a logical company". And the *Sunday Express* of November '79 stated: "EMI, under its board of largely extinct volcanoes, has become a long running flop with a few good scenes".

From December '78 to June '79, EMI lost £14.6m on its record division, cutting pre-tax profits by 58%. As well as music, EMI's attempts at film-making had become a disaster: high budget, awful films that failed. At the same time, its development of the EMI-Scan, a high-powered

Following his fearless exposés of the Pink Floyd's financial dabblings and the UK record industry in general, Leon Thorne focusses the microscope on the company that brought you the Beatles, didn't bring you the Sex Pistols, and never stops blaming us home-tapers for not buying their expensive records... EMI.

body scanner which sold at around £1m a unit, drained its resources (and was undercut by subsequent American models). The only success by the late '70s was its defence sector which produced high-tech weapons and accessories for the army, in particular the night-seeing device clipped onto rifles and used in Northern Ireland. All in all, 1979 was to be the year of reckoning.

## IGNORING NEW TALENT

The crisis that ended with EMI's merger with Thorn was precipitated by a decline in the market, due to the recession, but the company's failings date back to the days of the boom. Put simply, EMI failed to invest in new talent; it spent the money earned from music in making bad investments in other unrelated fields, and continued to pump out the old past successes. Whereas Warner Brothers spent 18-20% of sales revenue on signing new talent, EMI spent only 8%. Even the people that EMI *did* sign they failed to hold and gain from; the Sex Pistols are the most classic example.

EMI's chairman, Sir John Read, reacting to the Pistols' interview on Thames TV (part-owned by EMI), said it was "disgraceful" and described EMI's policy on music as follows: "on a number of occasions (EMI had) taken steps totally to ban individual records or similarly to ban record sleeves or posters or other promotional material which it believed would be offensive". (point of information, it was mainly action by the women in the packing factory which resulted in the banning of "offensive" sleeves and posters for the Sex Pistols)

In the same period, EMI was waiting for a different sort of music

revolution. In the words of a then-director of EMI, Lord Delfont: "We (EMI) are waiting for a new musical force to explode, but none of us can tell what it will be. The public might go back to the waltz or the foxtrot or the sound of the big orchestras." (*Financial Times*, 11.7.79). Such was the vision of the EMI executive.

EMI's reaction to the recession of the late '70s and with it the increase in competition from American and European-based rivals, was to cut back even more and resulted in a loss in the music core of the company. They cut new signings, the life-blood of future profits. In the words of Leslie Hill, then joint Managing Director of EMI Music: "Something like the Beatles happens only once in 100 years. We can't go on hoping that it will happen again tomorrow. Instead we have to invest more carefully, judging not just on talents but on the abilities of artists to deliver the goods." (*NOW*, 19.10.79).

This is not a policy that could be expected to try out anything new, and it failed as more and more new talent signed with other companies.

## 'BUREAUCRATIC' AND 'INSENSITIVE'

The music business is, in the words of the *Financial Times*, the 'exploitation of creativity.' As such, companies are often seen by musicians as parasites on their talents, feeding off them to re-channel the profits to other fields. The problem for EMI was that it had become very bad at managing musicians; 'bureaucratic' and 'insensitive' were the words most often used at a time when it no longer held a monopoly which forced musicians to sign with them.

But the problems of EMI were deeper than just bad management decisions, though these didn't help. Underlying EMI's decline lay fundamental weaknesses of the company and of British capital as a whole. In British terms EMI was huge and dominant, but on a world scale, it was only medium-sized. Not only was it smaller than its international rivals, it was spread over too many fields. In each different sector, it faced larger and more specialised rivals. In effect, EMI was a collection of small companies which failed to gain from economies of scale.

## THE BID FOR GLOBAL CONTROL

As the '70s developed, the large music companies combined and evolved into huge units centred on production of electronic and music equipment, as in Europe or Japan, or on entertainments/media companies, as in America. Against them, EMI was far too small and diluted into too many fields. The world market became one where these billion dollar multinationals were involved in an increasingly competitive fight for dominance. EMI lost. In addition, the one market that EMI still held sway in, the UK, was a stagnant one. British capital stagnated or grew by a mere 1-2 per cent, while European or Asian markets expanded by leaps and bounds. By the end of the '70s, even its home market was penetrated by its rivals, particularly CBS and Warner Brothers.

In the '60s, EMI seemed to grow in spite of itself on the success of the British sound abroad, not on any great ability of EMI to market, sell, or sign new talent. With the conservative policy of EMI signings, the increase in competition on a world scale and bad investment decisions the weaknesses of EMI were brought to the surface. Today the revamped Thorn/EMI, having closed 15 factories, blame their problems on home taping and declining demand. EMI's collapse, however, is less due to the 'stealing' of the consumer and more to the decisions taken inside EMI boardrooms, and the weakness of British capital. ● ● ●

# TEAR IT UP!



photo by Paul Harris

Paul Burlison at Caister-on-Sea, November '81

## The Paul Burlison interview

by Paul Harris

1956! Paul Burlison, lead guitarist with the legendary rockabilly group — The Johnny Burnette Trio — drops his Fender amp. The accident knocks a valve loose. The rest, as the cliche goes, is history. Burlison's guitar sound was a scorching fuzz from then on, to be imitated by countless guitarists worldwide. The only surviving member of the original Rock'n'Roll Trio, Paul Burlison, was interviewed and photographed by Paul Harris at Caister-on Sea in November 1981.

Paul Harris: Can we start with where you were born?

Paul Burlison: I was born about 50 miles east of Memphis — in Brownsville, Tennessee, Hayward County. It was a small community — I was actually born on my grandfather's farm.

When was this?

February 4, 1929.

And these were hard days?

Sure, they sure were. My grandfather had a farm and it was during the depression days, 1929

was, and it was hard. Everybody in the family worked, everybody. When we went to the fields, as soon as we got big enough to work at all, to chop cotton, pick cotton by hand. They have machines to do it now but we did it by hand then. All the kids would go to the fields with their parents and our mothers would take the quilts and spread this quilt down at the end of the cotton row, and let one of the larger kids stay with the babies and you'd have to watch them real close you know, because if something happened to them they'd go get the mother. But the other kids used to work right

along with the family, they'd chop cotton just like the family would. Then the mothers had to come home and fix lunch or supper. Most of the time she'd fix breakfast in the morning and she'd pack a lunch we'd take it to the fields with us and we'd sit under the trees and eat lunch. Then late in the afternoon, sundown when everybody'd go to the house and my mother still would have to fix supper for the night, for us to eat. Times was hard.

### SHOES TO BLUES

In these poor circumstances how did you come to get your first

guitar?

Well, we moved to Memphis when I was an early age. My grandmother got real bad sick and she had to go to the hospital so my grandfather had to sell the farm. She stayed in the hospital a couple of years and it just about broke him. He paid off every dime to the hospitals and everything, and so my father packed us up and moved us to Memphis. He got a job in Memphis running the local street car there in town. So later he became a house builder but when we first got there he was driving a street car. Times were still hard and I had a hole in



the bottom of my shoe and my mother told me to go downtown, we didn't live too far from downtown, she told me to go downtown and buy me a pair of shoes. So I went down there and o' course I'd fell in love with the Blues and country music ever since I was just real little — listened to it on the radio, a little battery radio that would go out and would come back in.

*Who were you listening to on the radio?*

Oh, early days, Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, stuff like this, then I'd go downtown and I would hear all the Blues stuff around Beale Street. Out in the country where I lived out on the farm the old gospel singers around the church was the stuff, I loved it.

*Well let's get back to how you got your guitar.*

Okay. So she gave me two dollars so I walked downtown which wasn't very far, 10 or 12 blocks. I went down on Beale Street, there was a lot of pawn shops on both sides, it's changed now. I saw this little guitar in the window there and so I went in and talked to the man in there and I asked about the guitar, he wanted four dollars for it. I said "I ain't got but two bucks". I said "That's it, I'd sure like to have it." So I started to walk out and he called me back. I guess he could see it in my eyes I wanted it real bad. He called me back and he said "I'm gonna let you have it for two dollars." He let me have it for two bucks. The strings were about that high off the neck. It was small, about three quarter size guitar. I took the thing home and I hated to tell my mother so I put a piece of cardboard inside my shoe.

When I got home I hid my guitar under the bed, my mother

was working, my father was working, both was working. So that went on for two or three days, she thought I'd put the new shoes in the closet and I was still just wearing my old shoes. I'd take it out when they go to work, play on it all day long and slide it back under the bed before they came home at night. My older sister got mad at me one day and she told my mother and my mother was upset and she said "I'm gonna tell your father when he comes home and you'll probably get a spanking" so when he comes home he talked to me, he told me, "Son, if you want a thing that bad I want you to learn to play it." The next day I worked all day long on one string, on the bottom string. It was a little song called "I'm just here to get my baby out of jail". I worked on that thing all day and played it to him that night and he smiled, he could make out what I was playing.

*Were you entirely self-taught?*

I'm left-handed in everything I do except play guitar, everything. I write left-handed, eat left-handed, everything. I used to kick a football with my left foot.

*But you never had any instruction on the guitar at all?*

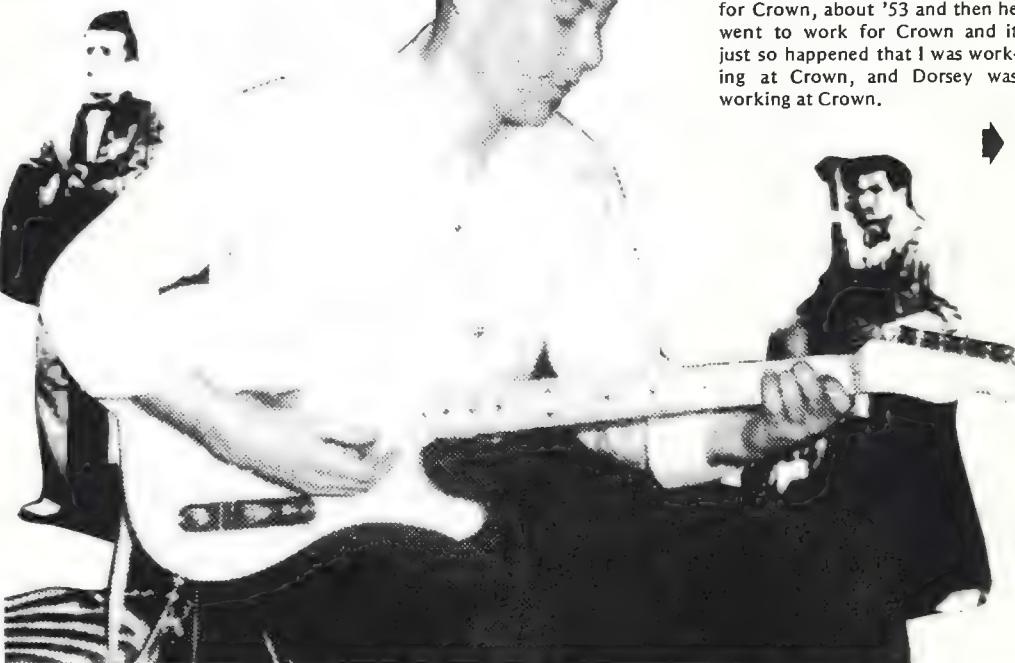
I never had a lesson in my life. I can't read a note of music, not one.

### THE BOXING BURNETTES

*I would now like to get onto the involvement with the Burnettes. I've read that you were a friend of the family.*

I've always been a friend of the family, ever since I've met them.

*Did you grow up with them?*



I met Dorsey in 1949. I met Dorsey first at the Golden Gloves boxing matches. He was boxing and I was boxing. I was playing in just a small country band, we was on radio, had a radio program and Dorsey heard us on the radio and we was at the boxing match that night and he said "I heard you playing on the radio today, heard them call your name. My brother and I play music too, let's get together sometime." I said "I'd love to." But Dorsey was playing in a different group at that time and Johnny was singing with them. We didn't actually get together till about '51 or '52.

*As a trio?*

We was playing in a group but we would do a special as a trio. We cut our first record in 1953 as a trio on the Von label, "Go Along Mule".

*As far as I knew it was '55 on Coral.*

No, '53 on the Von label, Booga, Mississippi, "Go Mule Go". "You're Undecided" was on the back of it. Eddie Bond's daddy produced it. Bill Bond took us down to Booga, Mississippi. He heard us one night singing and he liked what we was doin', a guy named Buddy Bain was then engineer. We did the thing in 1953.

*I take it it didn't sell?*

It didn't sell many.

*Did you do any other recording after that before '55?*

No, 'cause there just wasn't anything in Memphis at the time, there wasn't any recording studios to record anything except Blues, black stuff you know. Sam Phillips that's all he was into at that time, just black Blues. No, there wasn't a studio there except the Von label down in Mississippi. So we just hung around and we all of us worked on our jobs all week long, we just could play on weekends 'cause we brought up our families. So we just played on Friday and Saturday nights.

### ELVIS

*This seems to blow another story that I've read that the trio was based on Elvis's trio.*

Elvis came out and played with us before he ever recorded "That's Alright Mama". He came out, we played at a car lot, J. and S. Motors. He came out there and asked if he could sing a song on the show. We told him to come on up and do one. It was live, broadcast live to KWM, West Memphis, Arkansas from Memphis. KWM is right across the river in West Memphis and he came up there on the car lot. This car lot was sponsoring us, had a big trailer there. Now it's one of the biggest automobile agencies in Memphis. It's called Plus City Buick now, the guy that owns it, but he'd just started out and it was just a small car lot that he was tryin' to get people in and he had big speakers out there, people would pull in and park to buy cars, look at the cars and he was also broadcasting to the radio.

*Was this the first time you came across Elvis, when he asked to sing a song with you?*

Yeah, he was just a kid there. That was before he went to work for Crown, about '53 and then he went to work for Crown and it just so happened that I was working at Crown, and Dorsey was working at Crown.





*What song did he sing on this first occasion?*

He sang a song called "Your Birthday Cake".

*I don't know that one (laughing)*

It goes, "Take your finger out of it, it don't belong to you. Take your finger out of it, it don't belong to you" and right at the end of the song it says, "I'm talking about my birthday cake".

## SUN RECORDS

*Is it true that the trio were turned down by Sun records?*

No, we never went to Sun Recording Studios, I never was in Sun Recording Studios until Johnny and Dorsey got ready to go to California. We went in there and cut some tapes for them to take to California with them and I did it with them just as a favour 'cause I wasn't even involved with them any more. I did go there with them and cut these tapes. I've never met Sam Phillips in my life, I've never shook hands with the man. I know his sons real well, Knox and Jerry, I see them all the time but I've never met Sam Phillips. We never went inside the doors of Sun Studios until later after we went to New York and played all over and everything all over the country.

*So after the Von record the very first records that you had after that were on Coral?*

That's right.

*How did that deal come about?*

We went to New York and we won the Ted Mack Amateur Hour three times. The show was nationwide — this was the first national performance by a rock band. We went up there and took an audition just like everybody else, there was no pull, no managers, nothing. We went on our own, went down to the place and watched the show one week. We went round to the backstage just like everybody would do and asked how you get on the show. They told us to come up to this building and take an audition — if you pass, well we'll put you on.

*How was the voting, did the viewers vote?*

They had a vote meter and wrote in votes from all over the country but that night they had an applause meter, a big meter up there. Luckily for us they just socked it and it just stopped.

## TEAR IT UP

*So your first record after that on Coral was "Tear It Up".*

Right. But we couldn't even cut a recording session until after we'd played in this tour. Ted Mack, when you got on his show you had to sign a contract that if you won three times you would have to go on a tour with them all over the country. Then after that tour you were free to do what you want to. So that held us up another few months because it a few weeks after we won before the tour began. So Capitol Records was after us, Coral Records was after us, ABC Paramount, Chess, it was five major companies was after us to sign a contract with them. Then we signed with a manager and our manager was a good friend of the manager of Coral Records, Bon Thiele, and they decided to go with Coral. I wanted to go to Capitol but they kept saying it didn't matter, a big record, it wouldn't matter. Tex Davis had already sent that song into Capitol, "Be Bop A Lula". The deal Capitol offered us was they would pick half our material and Coral let us pick all our own material. Then of course Capitol had nationwide distribution, they was such a big company, and I

there and played on these cases on "Tear It Up".

*Did you personally play on all the recordings?*

Absolutely!

*Only another thing I read is that there was some doubt, it might have been Grady Martin on some of them.*

He played acoustic when John was singing, he played acoustic.

*So he played as well, not in place of you.*

He just dropped by, he came by.

*You appeared in the film "Rock, Rock, Rock". Were there any other films?*

That's all the films

*How did that come about?*

Through our manager and Alan Freed. Alan Freed saw us and heard us and he wanted us and we did about three shows for him live



think now, looking back, Capitol would have been the best deal.

*Where were the records for Coral made?*

The first three recordings was made in New York City at the Pythian Temple, that's where Bill Haley cut "Rock Around The Clock". Al Hibbler cut a lot of his stuff, a big popular artist over there. It was just so big, it was a great big Music Hall. It was just too big. New York was kind of cold to us. We're Southern boys and we didn't like it, it was just too big and too much happened up there. We did the first session up there, they had a 32-piece orchestra sittin' there and they told us to tell them what to do. We said, "We don't know what to tell you to do, we just play what we feel." So we just used the drummer! He played on the suitcases and he was scared he was gonna burst his hands. He was playing with brushes and I said "Man, don't play good, just play loud" so he put his cases over

in New York City before we did the movie.

*I think you toured with Gene Vincent once?*

Well, he was touring with us! He came on after we did, right after we did and they booked him on some of the same shows that we was on.

*Who else toured with you — as opposed to you touring with them?*

Let's see, Everybody in the Rock 'n' Roll field and Rhythm 'n' Blues. You name them, the Moon-glowes, the Flamingoes, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, Lavern Baker, Chuck Berry, I could go on and on, Carl Perkins, Gene Vincent.

*Fats Domino?*

I never played a show with Fats, missed him all way around, never played one with Little Richard. Nat King Cole, Mahalia Jackson,

Eddie Fontaine, Teresa Brewer, Dorothy Collins; Eydie Gorme and Steve Lawrence, we played Niagara Falls with them before they got married. Andy Williams's first nationwide television show the night we was on the "Tonite" show, that was Andy Williams's first night. Cathy Carr, "Come Down From Your Ivory Tower", Lillian Briggs, the blonde-headed girl that played the trombone, Lonnie Donegan from England, I could just go on and on, my memory's 25 years gone, I can't think back.

## BOW TIES AND ARGYLL SOCKS

See, we'd play with a group for maybe a couple of weeks then we'd jump over to where our record was going big. Like "Tear It Up" was number one in Boston, in different spots all over the country, it wasn't a smash, big all over but it was number one in different areas, in Boston, Cleveland, Ohio, see they'd shift you from there to there. This was all booked through the same booking agency which was the biggest. Back in those days there was two major booking companies in the United States, one had half the US the other one had half. The William Morris Agency had all the West Coast and GAC (General Arts Corporation) had everything on the East Coast. It was the last days of the big bands, you used to see little combos, something like that, like we'd call 'em the Doo Wops, the Rhythm and Blues groups, they went through their thing, everybody wore tuxedos, the bow ties. We even wore bow ties, but all of our clothes was specially made in New York City and we had the short jackets and pants with zippers up the side, and argyll socks.

*When did the trio break up?*

Right at the end of 1957.

*Why did it break up?*

We had families. All of us was married and being away from your family is hard, really, on the road, you get tired. Two years on the road, it's a long time and we'd play seven days a week, we was playin' a different town every night and it just got where I got tired.

*What did you do then?*

I started my own business as an electrical contractor. I moved right across the line three miles south of Memphis into Mississippi but I also had a licence in Tennessee so I could work in both states. It went on for 18 years — started off with one truck.

*You were out of music during this time were you?*

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Right, absolutely, I had people call me, want me to go on the road with them but I couldn't do it, I said if I quit playin' with the best why not stay with the best if I wanted to play, I just quit.

Did you have much connection with the Burnettes later?

Oh, all the time. We called each other. I don't guess we went a month without talkin' to each other. Never. Dorsey was in my house a week before he died. We was like brothers. Why we broke up was just I wanted to be home with my family. That's all it was. John waited on me a month for me to make up my mind before he went to California. Dorsey had already went to California and he stuck around me for a full month. He asked me to go to England in 1962, the first one he called when he came over here.

#### MEMPHIS HERITAGE

So for 18 years you had this business. How did you get back into the musical side again?

Well, all my children are grown and married and everything. I didn't really have time to mess with it too much 10 years ago, I was too busy making a living for my family and working real hard. The past 10 years I've been getting an awful lot of mail wanting to know about the trio, what's happening, can you still play that way, stuff like that. So I would answer back, write back and tell 'em and it got me interested to do it again. When Dorsey died I called a bunch of guys and asked if they'd like to do an album for them and they said they'd like to so we did the album and I got a lot of mail from that. So then we got a show in Memphis. We played a show, back in September, it was called the Memphis Heritage Music Festival, sponsored by Schlitz Brewery. We played that in front of 8,000 people and we got three standing ovations and it really pleased us.

So it started with recording the album, that's the Rockabilly label album, then you did this festival and it's the same people who've come over here this time is it?

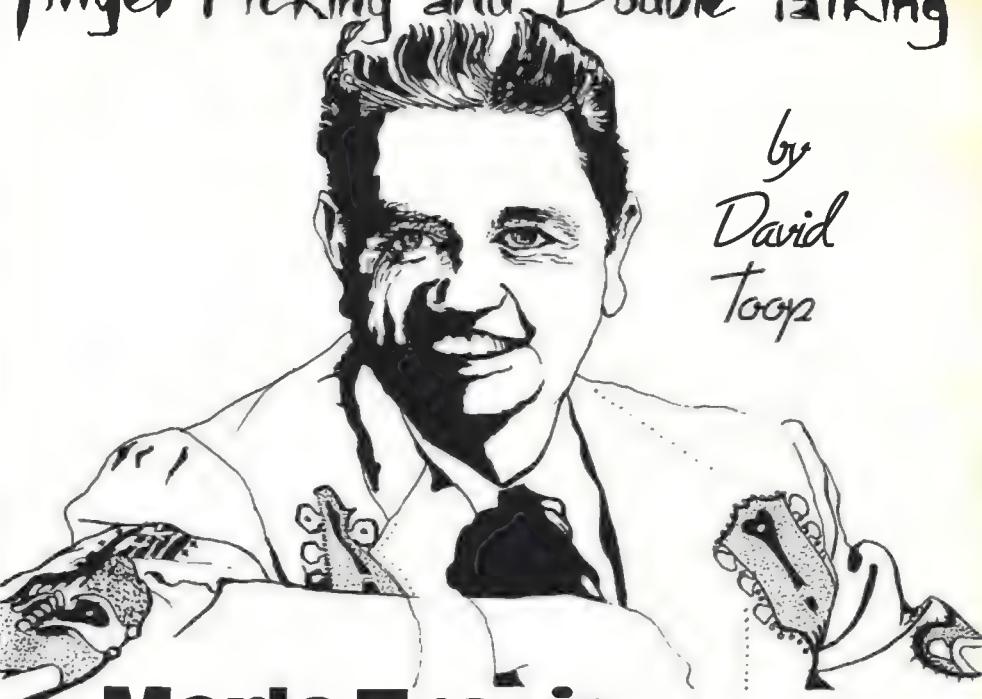
Right. Of course Rocky (Burnette) was already in the recording business and Billy his cousin is in the recording business so they've already established themselves as artists so I called Rock and asked if he'd like to come over here when they called. He said "Yes." I've really enjoyed being here, I really have, I've had a good time.

Thank you very much Paul for giving me the time for the interview. Thank you very much indeed.

You bet! ■

# Finger Picking and Double Talking

Illustration by David Toop



by  
David  
Toop

## Merle Travis

Merle Travis may not be a household name but without him music would be drastically different. David Toop outlines the reasons why.

*When my baby doesherdou-bubble  
ta-halk to me-bee,  
Then I gil-fit jefus as half-happy  
as I can be be,  
And everyty fy my whole four  
hal-fan,  
We're ilfin another hal fan,  
With a lilingajo from the wheel  
fikanulo from the stal fan.*  
from "When My Baby Double  
Talks to Me".

When *Rolling Stone* interviewed Merle Travis, the writer of the above verse, in 1975, they portrayed him as a doddering old fool making wild claims about inventing the Fender guitar. Four years later there was still enough life left in the old dog for him to cut three double albums for CMH Records in Los Angeles. Not bad considering the rate at which most *Rolling Stone* favourites ooze out records.

Merle Travis was born in Muhlenberg County, Kentucky – coal country – in 1917 and started playing banjo at the age of eight. Hearing the finger-picked guitar style of Mose Rager and Ike Everly (father of the Everly Brothers) inspired him to switch instruments. Guitar seemed a

more attractive career than coal-mining and Merle went on to develop a style of thumb and finger picking that has influenced countless country, folk and rock players.

#### FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

Changing the face of guitar music might seem enough for one lifetime but Travis seems to have been blessed (or maybe cursed) with a versatility that is positively awe-inspiring. Apart from playing in numerous bands, including the Brown's Ferry Four (with Grandpa Jones and the Delmore Brothers) and Tex Ritter's group, he rode horses in westerns, appeared as a guitar-playing sailor in *From Here to Eternity*, wrote numerous country classics ("Sixteen Tons" being the most famous), re-popularised folk tunes like "Nine Pound Hammer" and had numerous hits in his own right.

Merle also made his contribution to the revolution in music that gradually gained momentum through the '40s and '50s – the chemical reaction that resulted from combining the solid electric guitar with the development of recording studio technology and the marriage of hillbilly music with R&B. He recorded one of the classic country boogie woogie tracks, "Merle's Boogie", back in 1947, using the trick of slowing down the recording machine while taping the guitar part. Also in 1947 he designed the first solid

body electric guitar (and we all know what happened to that invention).

#### HEARTBREAK HOTEL

By the mid-1950s hillbilly boogie had slid into rock'n'roll. Checking the musicians on the first Elvis Presley RCA sessions ("Heartbreak Hotel" et al) reveals guitarists Scotty Moore and Chet Atkins. Their biggest influence? Merle Travis, of course. Atkins, a remarkable Travis-style player, later went on to develop the Nashville sound, becoming one of the most important country music record producers.

Having helped create the folk revival, rock'n'roll and the solid electric, one might forgive Merle for a certain amount of pride or perhaps bitterness for his lack of recognition. On the contrary, he is probably the most self-deprecating musician in show business, regarding himself as a Jack-of-all-trades, master of none. ○

#### RECORDS

Many early Merle Travis recordings are very hard to come by but the CMH albums are recommended along with *The Best of Merle Travis* (Capitol SM 2662) and two excellent hillbilly/rockabilly albums with one Travis track apiece – *Rock 'n' Roll at the Capitol Tower Volume 2* (EMI 2 C 184-81970/1) and *Boogie Woogie Fever* (Charly CR 30215).

# The Laugh Riot



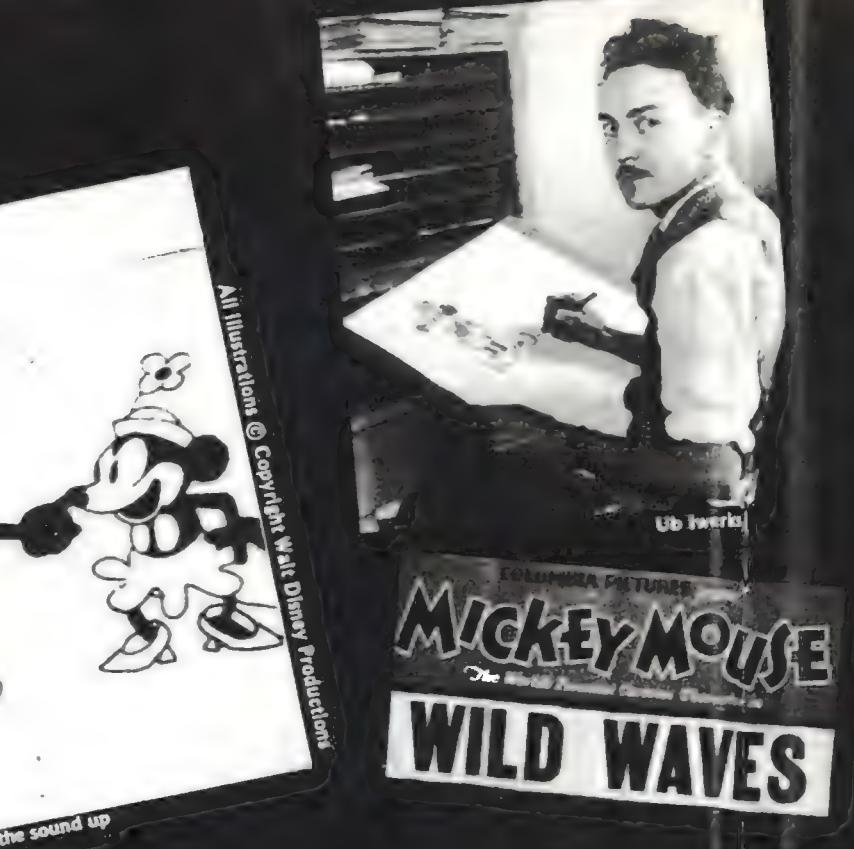
Walt Disney's cartoons were the first to be produced with synchronised sound and music. From 1928 to 1938 the Disney Studio produced one hundred and sixty six short films in two series: the Mickey Mouse adventures and the Silly Symphonies. Much of the popularity of these films was simply due to their use of music and sound effects, both of which had a great novelty value. This was so important and innovative that it caused the American composer Jerome Kern to remark somewhat absurdly in 1936:

'Cartoonist, Disney has made the 20th century's only important contribution to music. Disney has made use of music as language. In the synchronisation of humorous episodes with humorous music he has unquestionably given us the outstanding contribution of our time. In fact, I would go so far as to say it is the only real contribution.'

Walt Disney was a prime representative of American culture and an influence throughout the world. As a ruthless businessman he built his castle from cartoons and as an opportunist in 'the land of opportunity' he put his name on everything in his kingdom. He is often thought of as an animator but in fact he stopped contributing his own drawings after 1926. His main importance after that was as an organiser, demanding new developments and high quality from those working for him. Although the silent animated cartoons his studio first produced were well received, and their drawings admired, it was through the introduction of cartoons with synchronised sound and music that Disney's name was originally made.

## A RABBIT AND A MOUSE

From 1920 onwards Walt Disney worked with an excellent young animator, Ub Iwerks, making silent animated shorts for various distributors. In 1927 the studio started producing a series around a character called Oswald the Rabbit. Later that same year Charles Mintz and George Winkler, who released the series for Disney through Universal, forced Disney to hand it over to them since they



## Walt Disney's Early Music: Mickey Mouse to Snow White

by Andrew Brenner

With the Disney Studios' 'Tron' doing more than respectably, thanks to its virtuosic computer animation, and 'E.T.' being compared by everybody to a trad Disney movie, Walt's name is definitely back in the news. Andrew Brenner reflects on the enormous industry that had everyone whistling while they worked, and the suss, scheming and skills behind all those wild running pigs, skeletons and monkeys – not to forget a couple of famous Mice.



held the copyright on the name 'Oswald the Rabbit'. So Disney's studio began to produce a series around the character Mickey Mouse and hoped to find a new distributor later.

## SOUND JUDGEMENT

Lee De Forest had devised a workable sound system in 1923 but this was not utilised until 1927 when Warner Brothers released *The Jazz Singer*. The film industry was shaken and there was much indecision and caution over the use of sound. Max and Dave Fleisher produced a sound cartoon which went virtually unnoticed because the soundtrack was unsynchronised. Disney had completed Mickey Mouse's first film,

*Plane Crazy*, and was working on the second *Galloping Gaucho*, both silents, but then decided to halt production. He wanted to produce a cartoon with a musical soundtrack synchronised to the action, so work began on a third Mickey Mouse cartoon, *Steamboat Willie*, which was planned as a first release. *Galloping Gaucho* and *Plane Crazy* were withheld until sound could be added.

Since *Steamboat Willie* was to be the first cartoon with synchronised sound and there was then no known method for matching recorded sound to animated film, Wilfred Jackson, a Disney animator with a strong musical background, had the idea of synchronising musical beats per second with the film frames per second.

# The Laugh Riot



Sound effects — it was hard working for Disney!

Les Clark, another animator at the studio, described the process:

'We worked with an exposure sheet on which every line was a single frame of action. We could break down the sound effects so that every eight frames we'd have an accent, or every sixteen frames, or every twelve frames. And on that twelfth drawing, say, we'd accent whatever was happening — a hit on the head or a footstep or whatever it would be, to synchronise to the sound effect or the music.'

## BOUNCING BALLS

Jackson also invented the 'Bar Sheet Technique' for visually representing the music, sound effects and action. For every bar of music, there is an equivalent instruction for everything else, written on the same sheet of paper below. Jackson's system was first used to score the soundtrack for *Steamboat Willie*, completed in September 1928, and is still in use today.

Even when the soundtrack was scored, recording it was not straightforward. RCA and Western Electric held all the patents on sound recording equipment at this time and Disney apparently could not agree terms with them, so finally he decided to use Pat Powers' bootleg 'Cinephone Process'. Carl Edouard, an orchestra conductor from the Strand Theatre in New York, was hired to conduct a 20-piece band. The

first session was disastrous because Edouard disregarded the flashes on the film which were supposed to mark the time and instead attempted to follow the action as he was used to doing for silent films. Disney had to pay for a second session with a smaller band and this time printed a bouncing ball on the film which Edouard followed!

## COW EATS SHEET MUSIC

*Steamboat Willie* opened at the Colony Theater in New York on November 18, 1928, for a two week run. Disney had not been able to find a distributor but the cartoon was well received and soon moved to the renowned Roxy. Pat Powers eventually offered Disney a distribution deal which, although not wonderful, he had to accept. *Film Daily* called *Steamboat Willie* 'a real tidbit of diversion' and the *New York Times* said 'it is an ingenious piece of work with a good deal of fun. It growls, whines, squeaks and makes various other sounds which add to its mirthful quality.'

The use of sound in *Steamboat Willie* established many precedents. Strong rhythms and well-timed sound effects added new depth to the visual gags already common in cartoons, while greater integration made the cartoon more compelling and gave

the animator increased control over the timing of jokes. In addition they created sound-oriented gags, such as a cow eating sheet music and producing the song when its tail is cranked. Using visual equivalents for instruments became the dominant type of joke: a cat's tail would turn into a stringed instrument; a cow's teeth a xylophone. This became a standard source of laughs for sound animators and the novelty of such use of sound certainly played a major part in maintaining the studio over the next 10 years. The two main musical themes of *Steamboat Willie* were 'Steamboat Bill' and 'Turkey in the Straw', which, like most of Disney's early music, came from the public domain in order to save money on the payment of royalties.

During the work on *Steamboat Willie*, Carl Stalling joined the studio as Disney's first musical director. Having previously worked as a theatre organist and conductor at the Isis Theatre in Kansas City, Stalling's first job was to score soundtracks for the two earlier Mickey Mouse silent shorts. After this, most soundtracks were recorded to a storyline

before the animation work began, so that the artists could work to the rhythm and accent of the soundtrack. Stalling's scores for Mickey Mouse became increasingly sophisticated — he wrote 'Minnie's Yoo Hoo' as a theme song for Mickey and the series in 1930. Two currently used techniques invented by Stalling are the 'streamer' — a line marked on the film indicating musical beats by zig zagging left to right; and the 'click-track' for pre-recording sound at the desired tempo.

## MUSIC COMES FIRST

Although music played a very important role in the Mickey Mouse series and cartoons such as *The Opry House* (1929) even had musical themes, the music was always secondary to the visuals and often a section of music would have to be condensed or lengthened to fit the action. This frustrated Stalling, who wanted Disney to make the action follow the music. So bearing this in mind the *Silly Symphony* series was begun in 1929 with Stalling — and the music — taking charge. The first of these films was *Skeleton Dance* where skeletons came to life and danced to Stalling's music which included an excerpt from Grieg's 'The March of the Dwarfs'.

Whereas the Mickey Mouse series was linked by the characters, early films in the *Silly Symphony* series were developed around fairly generalised themes —



## Walt Disney's Early Music: Mickey Mouse to Snow White



Frank Churchill conducts a recording session

*Springtime* (1929), *Night* (1930) and *Monkey Melodies* (1930). It wasn't until *The Three Little Pigs* (1933) that strong storylines and characterisations were successfully achieved. The major musical change in the early *Silly Symphonies* was their increased use of classical music; this clearly held the seeds of what later became *Fantasia* (1940).

In 1930 Pat Powers bought out Disney's chief animator Ub Iwerks in a failed attempt to force the studio to renew their distribution contract. Fearing that the studio would be doomed without Iwerks, Carl Stalling left as well — he later became musical director for Warner Brothers' *Looney Tunes*. Disney replaced him with Bert Lewis, who, like Stalling and many others, had his background in conducting the resident orchestras of silent film theatres and Frank Churchill joined the studio in 1931 having studied music at UCLA, played honky-tonk piano in Mexico, and been a staff musician on a Los Angeles radio station. Churchill worked as a musical writer and arranger, later composing for such classic features as *Snow White*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*. Leigh Harline and Larry Morey also contributed many songs and lyrics respectively to the *Silly Symphonies* and later to feature films. Paul J Smith joined the studio in 1934 and later scored most of Disney's *True-Life Adventure* series.

### "BIG BAD WOLF"

The increase in musical staff meant a shift to more original material. This clearly marked a turning point in 1933 with the success of *The Three Little Pigs* featuring the studio's first hit song, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf". Frank

Churchill had written the tune, based loosely on "Happy Birthday" and various staff members had contributed lyrics. The film was a smash and "Who's Afraid . . ." was one of the most popular songs of the American depression. *Fortune* magazine said:

'First of all it is simple, at a time when all other entertainment in America's theatres is designed for a disillusioned and sophisticated audience. It gives pleasure, it appeals to your simplest emotions, whereas other films cater to the complex emotions born of this troubled time.'

The film included one sequence where the wolf is represented as a Jewish stereotype, a standard joke in Hollywood at the time, which had to be altered when the film was reissued in 1948.

Sol Bourne, general manager of Irving Berlin Music Company, bought the publishing rights to "Who's Afraid . . ." from Disney; this marked the beginning of a long business relationship, and it was not until 1950 that Disney set up his own music publishing company. "Who's Afraid . . ." was soon followed by more original songs such as Morey and Harline's "The World Owes Me A Living" from *The Grasshopper and the Ant* and Morey and Churchill's "You're Nothin' But A Nothin'" from *The Flying Mouse* — both 1934 *Silly Symphonies*.

### JAZZ FOOLS RUNNING WILD

The musical themes of the Disney films offer fascinating glimpses into contemporary musical tastes. These were often comical, as in

the Mickey Mouse film *The Jazz Fool* (1929), which parodied *The Jazz Singer* and the *Silly Symphony* — *Cock of the Walk* (1935), which was a take-off of Busby Berkeley musicals. In 1932 Mickey Mouse had *The Whoopee Party*, where Minnie played "Sweet Rosie O Grady" on the piano and Mickey played "Maple Leaf Rag", with every animal and object in the house literally jumping to "Running Wild". *The Band Concert* (1935), a classic Mickey Mouse film and the first in colour, was based on a theme of opposing musical styles; while Mickey attempted to conduct "The William Tell Overture", Donald Duck repeatedly interrupted him, leading his band astray by playing "Turkey in the Straw" on a fife!

### HARMONY AND DISCORD

This type of musical theme was developed even more explicitly in the 1935 *Silly Symphony* — *Music Land* — a Romeo and Juliet style love story between the Prince of Jazz and the Princess of Symphony. The Isle of Jazz and the Land of Symphony are represented as two islands in the Sea of Discord, and the imprisonment of the Prince in a masonry metronome leads to war. However, all ends happily with the two islands united by a bridge of harmony. This is a direct allegory of the problems repeatedly facing Disney with musical and inverted snobbery. When working on *Steamboat Willie*, Walt wrote to his brother about Edouard and the band: 'They are very clever in their line — but want too much beauty and too many Symphonic effects . . . They think comedy music is low brow'. The early *Silly Symphonies* were criticised as attempts at being 'arty' for

their classical music content, and when similar criticisms were later aimed at *Fantasia*, Disney replied: 'It isn't high-brow to like good music'.

### WEAVING THE MUSIC

In 1933 Disney had begun to consider making a full length animated film. *Snow White* (1938), the first, represents the climax of his early work. One of the reasons for making a full length picture was certainly economic pressure — *The Three Little Pigs* had grossed \$64,000 but cost \$60,000 and Disney knew that a feature film could be much more profitable. However, it is unfair to reduce *Snow White* to an economic tactic; the film is a masterpiece of animation and made use of 10 years of developing knowledge of sound-synchronised cartoons. The whole film was designed to follow a musical beat and Walt pushed those working on the score to resist 'that influence from the musicals they have been doing for years. Really we should set a new pattern — a new way to use music — weave it into the story so somebody doesn't just burst into song.'

The score by Frank Churchill, Ollie Wallace, Leigh Harline and Paul J Smith reflected this search for integrated music and action; out of 25 tunes written for the film eight were used. The lyrics were contributed by Larry Morey and included such classics as "Some Day My Prince Will Come", "I'm Wishing" and "Whistle While You Work". *Snow White* was, of course, a huge success and Disney received one large and seven tiny Oscars for it. Yet in spite of this, Disney claimed he was: 'only conscious of the places where it could be improved. You see, we've learned a lot since we started this thing. I wish I could yank it back and do it all over again.'

### DISNEY — THE ORIGINATOR

Although the studio still continued to produce shorts, after this the main emphasis shifted to feature films; throughout the '30s, Disney's short cartoons stood alone as the innovations.

Ward Kimball, an animator at the studio explained Disney's originality:

'Many of the other studios were reaching into their bag of old silents and releasing them with new soundtracks by people like Jelly Roll Morton and Fats Waller, to which they would add a few ratchets and honks and slide whistles — and that was supposed to be a sound cartoon — but Disney cartoons made a real honest attempt to integrate sound and picture.'

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## Beat the Street

# African Pop in New York City

by Joe Blum

After a lot of nudges from certain record companies, the English music press has finally cottoned on to the idea that African pop music is intelligent and fun. But in New York City, as Joe Blum found, there are cultural complications. Musicians are forced into the conventions of the click-track, and the fickle fashion world of NYC. Friction is inevitable.

One of the problems with promoting African music in this country is that, unlike Europe, we already have several forms of indigenous black music, so anything from the Continent has to buck a lot of competition, even resentment, from locals who could hardly wish to see their own product as being in any way inferior. Consequently most African acts have been traditionally marketed to white intellectuals who feel they have nothing to lose by being open-minded, nor any African origins to possibly be ashamed of. However, there is also a very low-profile but substantial audience here of native Africans (the N.Y.C. African population is estimated at over 50,000) who do provide a reliable audience for working bands who come here periodically and play at places like the Club Afrique and the Fez Ballroom in Brooklyn.

Among these bands is a group called the African Connection, which consists of emigres from Liberia and Sierra Leone, and includes some of the best musicians from those countries; an earlier band from Liberia had a pan-African hit recently called "O.A.U.". The name represents the unity of African peoples, but the band is purely a musical entity. It is now permanently stationed in the States and has kept pretty busy for the past couple of years entertaining not only the African community, but also Haitians and West Indians.

### PINNING ON LABELS

It is hard to understand why or how a movement begins, but it is apparent that there is now a flurry of interest in "African pop" (the decision to give it that name symbolizes the new awareness — it was never called that before, anymore than Latin music was called "salsa" until they pinned the marketing label on it in the mid-'70s. The attention to this music is not only in England, but in France, where the magazine *Actuel* has just "discovered" the sounds from Zaire, and here in N.Y. where they are so thoroughly knocked-out by Sunny Ade they gave him a full-page review in the *Village Voice*.

In the wake of this sudden expansion of musical taste, the African Connection has appeared with marked success at various New Wave discos here. And even the critics were dancing. Now I always believe that good music gets its audience,

and when these people get up and dance all night long it's because the music speaks for itself. I certainly don't like the attitude (which is common around the media) which holds that the public is stupid and can only respond to the Lowest Common Denominator of Art; i.e. that it needs to be spoon-fed (and garbage at that), because that's all it can appreciate. But that's the prevailing attitude, and it has some strange consequences.

can't seem to keep such a boring pattern for more than six or eight bars whereupon he reflexively lapses into polyrhythms and has the producer sweating. Which is why people really love to dance to this band. Which is also why probably, even when they do get recorded, they will most likely be considered a write-off rather than a pick for platinum. Be serious, who's gonna spend millions promoting a group when the drummer can't even lay down a 2-and-4 backbeat without going crazy?

What they obviously prefer to promote here is Sunny Ade, but not as a ju-ju musician, rather as some sort of crossover act! Ade is certainly too fine a performer to be ruined by over-production and hype, and even some of my best friends like his record. But as far as I'm concerned it has the wrong title. Rather than *Ju-Ju Music*, why not *Ju-Ju Fusion*? It's not what they say it is, and I'm stubborn enough to believe that people can like this stuff without having it tampered with. Unfortunately, it looks like a fight.

### TAMPERING WITH STYLE

One must try to perceive all this from the point of view of the African musician. The African community here is separate, invisible, underground. Even if an African band is working steady they need day-gigs in order to feed their families, and ordinary channels don't provide access to the community-at-large. The African clubs are not ordinarily advertised, nor are imported records marketed in most shops. In Africa one does not need to change style in order to come up with a hit record, but this isn't Africa, and since most musicians would love to sell a million copies (wouldn't you?), a change of style is inevitable. The musicians don't even seem to mind, perhaps they can't mind.

### A ONE-SHOT GAMBLE?

Unlike the blues, which is marketed as an ethnic staple, African pop seems to be a phenomenon, sort of a one-shot gamble the record industry is willing to take because "certain people like it and it just might go over". Therefore no attempt has been made to seriously educate people as to its origins, history, nature or many forms, other than John Storm Roberts' heroic efforts on *Original Music*. I get the feeling that if Sunny Ade fails to be another Elvis when he comes to tour (as happened with Fela several years ago), we might get a flagging of interest from the media. They seem to believe that since he's a superstar in Nigeria he might become one here, even if he does sing in Yoruba. It seems to me we need broader exposure to African music in general, and less of the attitude which presumes that an act is only worth promoting if it guarantees you a million-seller in advance. □ □ □



Illustration by Paul Bradshaw

The African Connection wound up in the studios recently to do a demo for an Atlantic subsidiary, and the hit-conscious producer on this date just knew this stuff wouldn't go over well (some sixth sense?). He kept stopping the tape and yelling at the trap-drummer to play as simply as possible, outlining the most banal of disco beats in time to the click-track, but he kept running into the same obstacles. One, for some reason the African Connection drummer can't keep time to a click-track. Two, somehow, despite any number of desperate pleadings to stick to a 2-and-4 backbeat, he

# INVISIBLE HITS



**sonny roberts**

## *The Caribbean Connection*

INTERVIEWS

photo by David Corio

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# INVISIBLE HITS

Sonny Roberts: I know what the people want. Matter of fact I wish I was a disc jockey because I would have a large listening audience. This experience, this shop, has learned me the record business the hard way. I don't get a lot of radio plays but I managed to survive for the 17½ years without going to a man and saying lend me this or lend me that to help me. I know the bank did help a bit — I managed to convince the bloke that I could run a record company and he listen a bit. Most of the things I put out — although you don't hear the record on the air — Capital you hear a few maybe, late in the night 12 o'clock when most people are sleeping, which I still grateful for that — but I manage to sell straight to the public.

I use the market shop a lot and it has surprised me I even sell to the white people of this country. That's why I think the radio station is wrong in this country. They are saying to us "OK. We don't think this is good enough. We know what we think is good for the people." I think they're wrong. They don't know nothing because when my records play in the market shop you're surprised to know the white people go "What's that? Who's that there? I never heard of him! I want that record!" and we proved that the system is wrong.

## ORBITONE NEVER FALL TO PIECES

Steve Beresford: *So you're selling a lot of records?*

SR: We selling a hell of a lot. You know a lot of the record companies are going through a hell of a hard time in this country — big and small. Orbitone is the only one since it started never fall to pieces and never go bankrupt.

SB: *So what's like the average sale of an album?*

SR: Take Tim Chandell — that was one of the records most people laugh — even the people in the reggae business. They say "You're mad. You're joking!" But I managed to sell about 67,000 albums which I think should be in the British charts — mark, it take me a few years to do that — but that said album, it should be more than that now.

SB: *Which album is that?*

SR: *The Loving Moods of Tim Chandell.*

photo by David Corio



One thing you can be sure about chart hype and hit-making complicity is that the practice is still with us in 1983. You probably won't have heard many of the genuine top-selling records in England — they don't appear on Top of the Pops; you won't hear them on the radio; at a pinch you might be able to buy a few of them in Woolworths. Who are we talking about? Tim Chandell, Peter King, Roy Alton, Ace Cannon, the ubiquitous Jim Reeves. Who are the buyers? Many of them are the older generations of West Indians who came from the Caribbean to find that their contributions to English life would be ignored and abused. Collusion talks to On U Records mastermixer Adrian Sherwood, Creation Rebel keyboardist Fatfingers and Orbitone Records director and shop proprietor Sonny Roberts.



David Toop: *That was the first one, right?*

SR: Yeah — that album is still selling up to now and he has done four other albums which is still ticking over although they don't sell as much as 'The Loving Moods...' but they still selling.

SB: *How much?*

SR: The other ones — 20,000 - 16,000. If an album or a single can sell that much that mean if that had got radio play that could be in the chart. That's why I say if I go to a big company I have to be careful what A&R man I pick up because I think an A&R man should know what the people outside want.

SB: *But basically you do the A&R, right?*

SR: I'm doing it. Direct contact, I think that's the best A&R. I tried to convince many major companies in this country and they all think I'm talking rubbish. I mean take *Gypsy Love*, the one I put out with Belinda Parker, a French girl, right. Now that record — the only radio station that is playing that record is the pirate D.B.C. (Dread Broadcasting

Company) — that record came out two or three months and has gone over 7,000 records. I'm trying to work with a major — a white company — to see if they can help me and I have hell convincing them. I said to many of these majors, "Come down, I'll show you the truth." Some of them think "Boy, how can you sell that amount of record. I mean record I know get 50-60 play and we don't even sell 500."

They tell me all this and then they don't believe you. But I think sooner or later they're gonna come round.

## CHART RETURNS

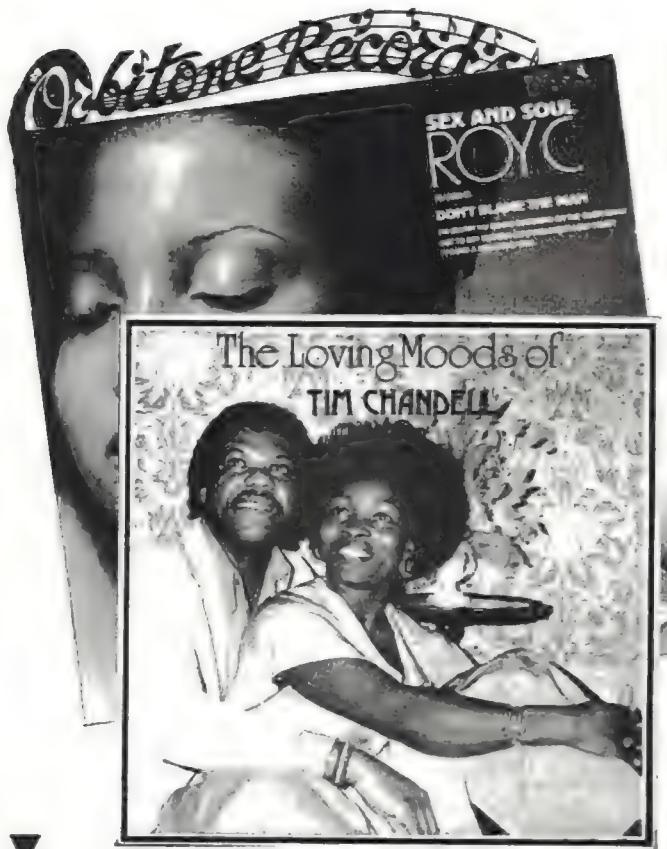
DT: *Your records don't sell in chart return shops, do they?*

SR: They don't. Matter of fact, I've been told that sometimes one of my records go into a chart return shop but I don't know if they get in enough chart return shops. Some of the shop does not take record unless you're getting a lot of radio play because I phoned many white shops in this country to say "Have you heard of this artist?" "No." "Are you interested in taking some of these records?" "Oh, no." So you must go through the major distributor,

you know. But I think it's all wrong again because, as I say, I am here to sell *any* record. It doesn't matter whether they're white or black. Ace Cannon record — I've sold near 2,000 copies of that — that's why Decca released it — because of that — and he's a white guy. Black people wanted that record. It never gets played on the radio and I think records like it would make hits just like *that*. I'm working without any heavy promotion. Well, I understand that a few radio stations in Australia are playing Roy Alton. We have people from Sweden and France, now, and I just had a big write up in Japan, which I can't read! Something is getting around but I have a job convincing white companies and the white radio stations in this country.

Sometimes I begin to feel hurt myself because I sell quite a few exports from this country — France, America, Canada, Africa, Switzerland. I say it's unfair because this money is coming back to England. The company is a British company, right? I think the Government should be looking into this sort of thing because is company out there crying "We are falling down" but here is one standing up here on his own without any help from anybody. I think it's unfair to have radio stations in this country holding back these companies. Other companies are spending a whole lot of money — thousands of pounds — to promote one record and here's one selling without because I haven't got that kind of capital to promote, because I use that money to go into the studio and make the next record to make my catalogue stronger. Radio stations like Capital and BBC Radio One — I'm sending them records. I really feel hurt sometimes but I say I've got to go on, I'm gonna show them.

Is like I was watching the television in America about a year and six months ago with a guy who break the salsa and when I see things like this it cheer me up, you know. Want me to go forward and I say one day I would like to have a skyscraper like that (laughs). As one white company tell me once, he said, "Mr Roberts, you have many hits in your company because every time you send a record to us and I play it all the office people run out and say 'Who is that?'" And he said "Keep on." It's not to say that the white people don't want it.



They want it but they're not hearing it.

#### WHITE AND BLACK

DT: What kind of people do you think are listening to your records?

SR: White and black.

SB: Do you find different age groups buy different records — like Tim Chandell?

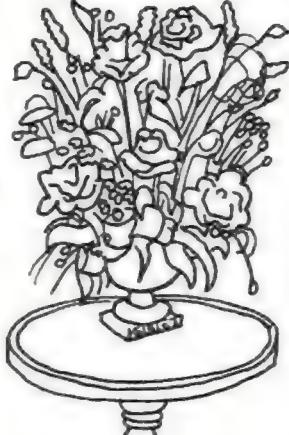
SR: When he started I find it was bigger people buying it but now it's changed and it's a mix. Like the girl, you know they're more loving. A lot of girls buy Tim Chandell — that romantic type of thing.

SB: You mean schoolgirls?

SR: Yeah, take the Soca music now. A lot of white companies say "this is Carnival music." And I say it's no more Carnival music. We still make records for Carnival each year. Now what we are trying to do — me and some guys in America — we find it is a very good dancing music and we are trying to take it away from there. Not take it out of Carnival completely but we are trying to get this as a popular music, just like you find soul — everyday you hear soul. You could get a Soca record anytime, just like you hear Marvin Gaye make a record one month, he make a next one the other month. That's what we're trying to bring it to.

And I'm getting a good vibe from them in New York. One

letter come yesterday and make me feel really good. They said "We appreciate what you've been doing for 10 years and we are well behind you. We send you sample and keep on the good work,



brother!" This make me feel really good and nearly bring tears, you know. Say, last year, what surprise me in Jamaica, well, you know we like reggae in Jamaica. I think calypso music is in Jamaica all the time but nobody was promoting that music. You find out these artists mostly work around the hotels. Well, it's changing now. You find Jamaican artists start to sing this type of music and they say "Well look, I think this is my root music."

I believe it's true roots music. It's the nearest to African music. African music is highlife and this music, I think, is a root music for the Caribbean. All the Caribbean Island come up with the identical

music. But Jamaica come up with reggae which is not my roots — it's not the music I hear when I was ten years old. My music I hear when I was ten years old was calypso. Reggae come from rhythm and blues which is the music the sound system used to play in Jamaica in my time.

#### MIXTURE OF MUSIC

SB: So what were you listening to when you were ten, other than calypso?

SR: Jamaica is a little island that plays a mixture of music. You still hear rhythm and blues there. You hear country and western. You hear smooth reggae, heavy reggae. Well in my time it was more mix music. You used to hear a lot of calypsos, rhythm and blues, merengues, bluebeat, mashed potato and all that sort of thing. But they're not the sort of people they hear something for the first time they don't like it. Once it's good, for the first time, they like it. I don't know if you read the story in the *Caribbean Times* I wrote, but I'm begging the youth to go back that way. I couldn't sit down and listen to a whole day of reggae, neither a whole day of soul, neither calypso or soca. I like a mixture of music because music to me is like the food that I eat. I think if the radio stations in this country work that way they're better off! That's how Orbitone Records runs — when this company start it only start from £30. I did get help from the bank but then they got frightened later on when I didn't have any sort of security.

SB: Was Orbitone a success right from the word go?

SR: Yes.

SB: And was that because you were selling records nobody else was selling?

SR: Yes. I was selling soft soul, reggae, cadence, calypso, African music, gospel. I was doing a bit of imports. Mark, I did struggle — I remember at the time for a few months I was taking £40. I really go through a hard time but I work hard. When other businesses close I used to stay here and do a bit of woodwork and all this sort of thing — make sound boxes to help pay the rent. I remember some time I stayed so late at night the police was knock at the door thinking I was a burglar and I used to come out covered in sawdust. I started 17½ years ago — hard work.

Like now, I work seven days a week. I'm in the recording studio on Sundays. I used to go on a Friday night because I had a little help on Saturday — and I couldn't go during the week. I'd go sometimes but it was very hard because I'd have to come back here and work the next day and sometimes

I'd feel like I'm flying, floating, you know what I mean? Saturday I used to come here to open the shop and sleep on the floor — the music would be blaring and I wouldn't hear it — I'd be so tired. I look back and think it was a bit dangerous, but then I feel if you want to be independent and be something you might die young but I like what I'm doing.

#### CHALK FARM STUDIOS

SB: You always used Chalk Farm Studios?

SR: Yes, but I'm using other studios now because Chalk Farm closed. I'm using Livingstone Studios which I'm happy with.



DT: How did that association start with Vic Keary at Chalk Farm?

SR: Well, you know Trojan Record was going on? I used to be a producer for some gospel record — Trojan used to put out some gospel record — and that's how I get to know Vic. I just get hooked on the guy! I thought he was a nice guy to work with. If you said "Vic, do that", he understand. I'm not a musician — I remember some years ago I want to get a sound, right — I think it was when I was doing Tim Chandell — and I said "Imagine, right, you're at the other side of a long pipe or a bamboo" — and he said "O.K.". He's quick too — he's a great guy to work with. I'm really sorry Chalk Farm close 'cos it was a very happy place, and a nice atmosphere. But I still do some work for him because he's the one who introduced me to Livingstone — like *Gypsy Love* — he's the one do it over Livingstone.

DT: What was the first thing you put out?

SR: The first was called "Lonesome Road". It didn't sell much. At that time I didn't understand the business much. The idea was there but the sound wasn't. You didn't know the proper musicians. Now, I know the proper guy to call. What I used to do, if I see a band outside here who I thought was good I'd say "I'm going to do a record — come back the whole band!" I think that's the wrongest thing I was doing! Because

# Orbitone Records

## Invisible Hits



ACE CANNON

some of the guy is quick to get on but some are holding back the other guy. So now I select. One guy I know like Linval Lewis, when I just started, he's become a great musician. He plays a lot of instrument — bass, organ, synthesiser, piano, the whole lot. When I go into a studio now I go in with three musicians — a drummer, a bass and a rhythm guitar, then I redub.

**DT:** And you use a vocal group — is that the Marvels?

**SR:** The Marvels is a good group that I know for years now. Matter of fact the girl happens to be my wife's niece. We all sort of grew up together and became friends. It's really a pity that the Marvels didn't make it — if the Darts make it I don't see why the Marvels shouldn't — to me, I rate them better than The Darts. The Marvels just released a record which is quite commercial — it's doing quite well but it's not getting any radio play.

### IT MAKE ME STRONGER

**DT:** Do you get resistance from the reggae programmes as well?

**SR:** Yes. Matter of fact I had an argument with the producer. I saw the guy in the Carnival about two years ago because I say to him they're not playing the product. I'm saying to them — this is a mixture of people in this country and you can't sit there for one hour or one hour and a half playing one type of music — it's bloody boring, to me! I said I think you'll get a larger audience if you play mixed music. He don't agree with me. He thinks the programme is a reggae programme and we can't play anything else. So I say O.K. — there's one thing though — once somebody say I'm not going to do a thing and we have an argument it make me stronger. Even Rodigan, we have an argument, because I'm saying the same thing with him. One day he phone me and I'll tell you what he said to me — "How is it Orbitone Records started and never go to pieces like a lot more company?" And I said "I don't know. You should know!" But the reason it survives — it's a mixture of things. There's a lot of people in this country like a mixture of things and I feel everybody should be satisfied, I'm saying "How can you sit on your backside and say this is what everybody must have?" I think it's going to change — it'll have to.

This record sell out within two weeks so I phoned and I say "Have you any more?" and it goes on like that. What you saw happen, people would buy the record here, like sound system people, they won't tell the other person where they get it from but everybody was on about this Ace Cannon record. I would sell more of the record if this never used to happen. Before the other shops got into it I already gone over 1,000 records. That helped me get an account with Decca without me paying a penny for it. Then Decca release the record.

**DT:** Any idea why his style got popular?

**SR:** Because the guy was doing more like Coleman Hawkins and Sil Austin and all this type of thing which was a very popular type of music in the Caribbean Islands. You'd sorta class him with the rhythm and blues set. But what also surprised me with that record is to know that a lot of black people were buying this record and some of them have white friends — white people were also coming here and asking for this record. That's why I say the radio is all wrong. If it wasn't for these black people — and this is a white man blowing there — a lot of white people wouldn't know about Ace Cannon. Decca released that record but it was never promoted. It was selling itself around the shops. And from the Ace Cannon I say if Ace Cannon does so well, come with Peter King, Peter King come and within minutes we had a hit in the Caribbean. Some guy run and say "Sonny, your record is kicking hell in Jamaica" which amazed a lot of reggae artists. So it make

with a bridge . . .

**SR:** Yeah, you know like John Holt in that time. You know how he used to sell a lot. And Ken Boothe, Pat Kelly. That's where I think *Lovers Rock* came back. Jamaica started getting interested. They didn't know about Orbitone Records. Sonic Sound, well, because of the Peter King — I was here one Saturday night and this guy phoned and said "Hello, is that Orbitone Records? Is Sonny Roberts there?" So I say "Sonny Roberts speaking." He say "Where you from?" I say "Jamaica," He said "We never hear anything about you yet! How come you so quiet. You got a record down here in Jamaica kicking hell. I would like to put it out!" That was Neville Lee from Sonic Sound and that's how I got to know Neville — great guy. It was a great day when he ring me — he made me feel somebody really appreciate what I was doing. And from that day we are friends.

Then I start visiting Jamaica and knowing a lot of people in the music business out there. They come here and now we talk. Then a few producers started coming out with that sort of thing — Bunny Lee, the great Ossie Scott — a great musician in Jamaica — I think it's going to come back like the '50s when they created many many type of music. It's started — you can see from Sly and Robbie. They used to play one type of music. They are in difference all the while and that's what I like. Create!

### COUNTRY MUSIC

**SB:** People tell me that Robbie listens to country music a lot.

**SR:** Yeah! It's a hell of a lot. You go to Jamaica — sometimes you



and I say "Bloody hell! Where you get that from!" He was surprised, he said "You like that?" I said "Look man, that's great man. You have more?" He said "I ain't got no more. I probably have about three." I said "Can you get me 50?" He said "Next week. Sure." And this guy, he get this record quick.

the cooler type of singer in Jamaica realise "Man, we'd better get back to it." A lot of them begin to change. You notice that the reggae is going back to a sort of classical thing which I think they stand a chance to sell more record.

**SB:** What you mean like a tune

hear like Freddy Fender. Take Roger Whittaker (laughs) — I go to Jamaica and I hear Roger Whittaker — he's very popular. No, I mean I like the guy singing but I don't buy Roger Whittaker. Neil Diamond, all these sort of people, they create a mixture of things going on out there.

Illustration by Glibet

# Orbitone Records

SB: Jim Reeves as well.

SR: Yes. He's popular here. Juke Box, all this sort of thing you know.

## PERCY, SOLOMON AND JOE

DT: A lot of the music you put out — Tim Chandell, some of the Peter King things — seem to partly come out of soul singers like Percy Sledge, Solomon Burke, Joe Tex and partly out of the '50s doo wop.

SR: Yes! Yes, I think those music in those days was nice but I don't think the promotion on these musics was good enough. That's why I go back to that just like how you see I go back to calypso music. I don't think reggae get a lot of promotion — it still need more. It did get a lot of promotion. I think the rhythm and blues didn't get a chance either. Jamaica was playing this thing on sound systems — Shirley and Lee, Rosco Gordon and all this thing.

SB: Whose records are in your window now, right?

SR: Yes. I like this type of music. That's the kind of music I grow up on. It's since I come into this country that I hear about the bluebeat and the ska.



When I came over here I used to go down to a record shop that used to be down by Great Western Road (Westbourne Park) — I think it's closed now — they used to run a travel agent and we used to buy calypso records on pre! For £1 on a slate — you know the one it's easy to break. And that sort of music we used to buy "Water the Garden", "Bed Bug", "Mildred". Actually that's the kind of music I grew up on. One company used to put out that type of music at that time was Melodisc. But I don't think

the music got any promotion at all. You didn't have a lot of black shops at that time. It was only just this one shop I know at that time. So I thought it's a good thing to promote — something different. And to create on it — because when Roy Alton came to me he want to sing calypso and in Chalk Farm Studio we have an argument. Because I said if I'm going to promote this music which I want to promote I'm not going to promote it the old fashioned way. We're going to renew this music.

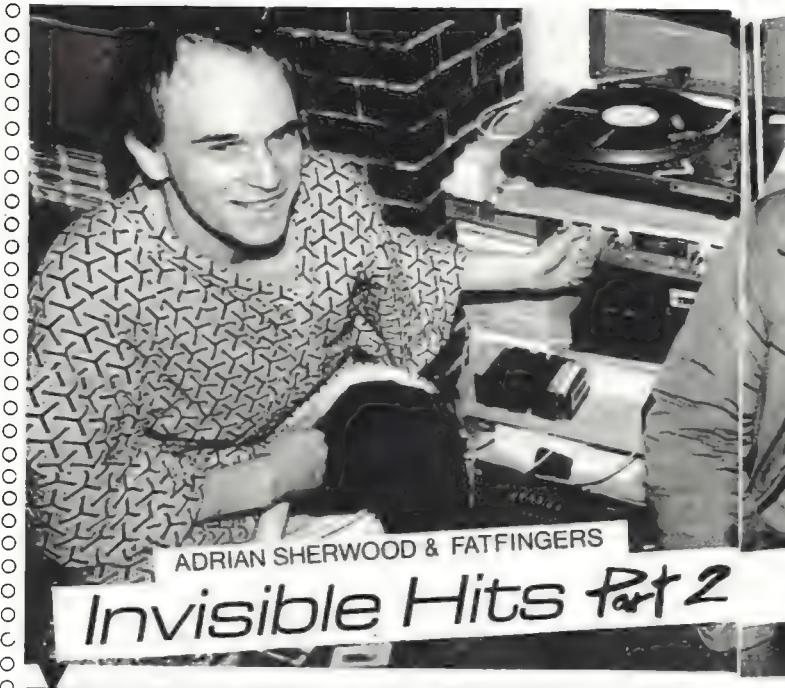


I didn't give the music a name. It so happened that it's helped the Caribbean because the music go down to Trinidad and they changed. There's one bloke came up with the name 'soca' and my line done in Chalk Farm, got caught up in the soca music. They don't actually give Sonny Roberts a credit but still I have the LP to prove it which was done something like three years before this music came out in Trinidad. Actually England, although I'm a black man in England, England helped to create that music.

SB: I've got one more question — what's spooge?

SR: Spooge is a music that's around the Dominican area. It's a touch of the calypso music. They're all very similar — a fast type of reggae — chingin, chingin, chingin, chingin — that type of music. It's near to calypso — they're all a sister to each other, you know. Yes, I've got it here you know — I listen to every type of music, even classical, and it helps me to produce. □ □

End of Part One



ADRIAN SHERWOOD & FATFINGERS

## Invisible Hits Part 2

Steve Beresford: It all came out of Sonny Roberts being on the radio — 'Black Londoners'. Apparently, he said he'd sold 80,000 Tim Chandell records and nobody mentioned it, or put it in any chart. The whole discussion was about racism.

Adrian Sherwood: Most of the records are like new versions of an old obscure type of soul music, r&b, doowop. They've re-kindled it. The records that started it all off before Sonny started making them — massive sellers, some you might have heard and some you will never have heard of. An album called *Southern Comfort* by a group of white Americans — Ace Cannon and his group. He's a sax player: country and western, r&b sax music. The best one is on the London label, something like greatest hits.

These albums, I think, inspired Sonny. It's his bag anyway, the sort of thing he really loves himself. He consulted, I think, Sonny Binns, the keyboard player. The real brains behind it all is a chap called Dimples. Now he had a group called The Marvels. He's responsible for all the Tim Chandell music, the actual music. Him and Sonny Binns.

### SEX AND SOUL

I think the inspiration for Sonny to make a Peter King album was Ace Cannon. Whereas the Tim Chandell albums were inspired by an album that has phenomenally big popularity amongst the grown-up black people in this country. An album called *Sex and Soul* by Roy C. It's a brilliant LP. The reggae track on that is out of this world. Another group called the Blues Busters, Canadian-based reggae, grown up music.

The demand is easy to create.

All you've got to do is have a record that sells itself. Those records fitted the demand of grown-up West Indians, who were by that time two generations misplaced from the West Indies. It rekindled their memory of a sound they were used to. It's a very horrible thing to say, but a lot of records came out and sold an amazing amount just because they vaguely fitted into that market. Records made by Bill Campbell and Peter Campbell (B-B and Jumbo labels) 100s of records — Honey Boy, Winston Groovy.

A lot of grown-ups had been put off by going into reggae record shops 'cos it was all youth music. They created a totally new market. You'll probably find that Orbitone now sells Roy Alton — 'Ebony Eyes' (the Everly's song), 'I'm Going One Day Tomorrow'. He did spooge, calypso-ey versions of those records. You had Honey Boy catering for the grown-ups with "Sweet Cherry" and "Impossible Love" — a couple of 100,000 sellers that never got in the charts. "Sweet Cherry" did 120,000, I think. You immediately find that when those records are suddenly swinging around the market place, people go in 'cos they know they're in stock. Artists that started it would be artists like Ginger Williams.

When did 'Sex and Soul' come out?

'74 or '75. There was a vacuum between '71 and '75, where young black kids started getting their independence in this country, and Rasta started coming out in the open about '73-'74. From '75 to now it has gone out of control. Initially in the early '70s, the grown-ups would buy the records and there'd be parties every Saturday night which the kids would

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and me got me grown problems towards as pre singles meant 60p market all records no market market Groovy to Trojan artists another on the rebel did that youth for the kinds Winston interests Winston many that led No rebels ups with Soul who or three and who still see day it's

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Kishi Yamamoto

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go to and hear the records. The fathers would buy the rebel records even, the rebel element in the fathers would come out and the sons would check the rebel records and the daughters would check the sweeter side, like John Holt or Pat Kelly, Bill Gentles — more and more.

Suddenly it started going more and more towards the DJ's, they got more popular. Bit by bit, the grown-ups — as economic problems got worse from '75 onwards — spent less money, whereas previously they'd buy lots of singles. The disco 12-inch market meant a record went from 55p to 60p and then into the disco market, and before you knew it all records were £2.20. There was no market for singles. The album market for Honey Boy, Winston Groovy type of material had shifted to Africa. The demise of Trojan and Pama meant that artists like Owen Gray (he was another very big one, particularly on the African side. He made rebel records as well in a way. He did that tune "Natty Bongo". The youths and the grown-ups checked for that one). There were no kinds of heroes around any more. Winston Groovy wasn't of any interest to the grown-ups. A Winston Groovy record had too many identifiable things about it that left it in the middle ground. No rebels would buy it, no grown-ups would buy it. So *Sex and Soul* was selling, honestly for two or three years as an import album, and when it came out here it was still selling. I bet you even to this day it's selling.

## THANK YOU NOW TO RITA

*There's something culturally vague about some of these records.*

They're well weird. You've got — on the reggae side, Winston Groovy, Owen Gray, Honey Boy. Slow ballad is down to Tim Chandell, and one you must check, even before Tim Chandell, a total maniac, he probably inspired Tim Chandell, he made a record that did about 20,000, but he's had bigger ones than that. I don't know whether he's lying to me, but he tells me that he did about 60,000 with a record called "Growing Old". I sold about 5,000 for him out of London. His name is Vasko. Used to have a record shop in Willesden, opposite where John Ruby is now — Freedom Sounds. What did he call himself when he sang?

He did one record that was a tribute to all the record shops in London. And people who worked in the canteens who played his records, 'cos no-one else would play them. "I'm going to say a big thankyou now, to Rita at Stamford Hill, at R and B Records" he's going like this, right, and in the background there's a weird doowop "aaaaah" thing. "I'm going to say a big thankyou to all the women who work in the canteens who play and promote my records — thankyou." He goes on — "I'm going to say thankyou to Tim at Sound 7 records on the Ridley Road market in Dalston — thankyoooooo." Then he goes on, right, "I'd like to say a big thankyou to Mrs Wyatt at Dudley Road, Wolverhampton." Absolutely mental stuff.

Most people don't even know it. Even the people who buy it don't remember the names of the artists. Me observing this, right, from selling the records in a shop and distributing them — I distributed Vasko's for him, on the Vasko label. They were about a dozen singles over ten years, and all of them sold colossal amounts. Why they sold, goodness only knows. It's a blue label, with a silver Vasko — horrific design. You'd love them probably, though I can appreciate that they gave people back a memory that they never had.

## PRINCE BUSTER TO MAX BYGRAVES

*What were these people listening to in Jamaica? Before they came here?*

American R'n'B stations, and the early Prince Buster R'n'B stuff; fore-runners to ska and calypso. So it was a total update of that, slightly more glossy, but the production was probably well tacky.

(Fat Fingers enters)

(to Fat Fingers) We're talking about everything that is *selling*. Cast your mind back and think about — we've not touched on the religious records, like the Watford Gospel Singers, they were massive

ellers — the more obvious ones. Think about Harlesden and what they sell in the shops, and what your mum buys, right, checkit. What do you think would be the biggest grown-up sellers?

FF Things like Jim Reeves and that "Little Toothbrush" bloke — Max Bygraves.

## GROW UP YOURSELF

What do you do when you find yourself in your mid-30s in the 1980s? You have to grow up yourself. Greyhound had a hit with "Black and White" in the early '70s; that was Sonny Binns again. The bulk of the firm-standing artists from that period are still involved — you'd be amazed to find what they're involved with. Winston Groovy, apart from Bob Marley is the biggest thing in Africa. Him and Jimmy Cliff and Honey Boy.

Do you know how much Caroline Records were offered by African guy to get Honey Boy to make an album? Fifteen grand! Straight up. Plus recording costs. Plus a tour guaranteeing him two or three grand a night, plus the bands' money on top of that. West coast of Africa and the Ivory Coast.

Winston Groovy and those guys were making a *type* of music — they didn't even know where their vibes were coming from, maybe. He had a big hit with the skinheads, right, with "Funky Reggae Chicken" or was it "Popcorn Funky Reggae Chicken"? They were spongey reggae type stuff, kind of mad Upsetter type things with the keyboards — Farfisa stuff. They were appealing to the skinheads and also grown up people; 'cos they liked Winston Groovy.

But next week he'd be making a ballad type reggae. Alton Ellis made much more classical records than they did, but not ballad-type reggae in the same way. I used to see Winston Groovy when I was 13 — done a gig with him. On the same bill was Owen Gray, and Steve Barnard was the M.C. A record from Grenada that topped 100,000 — "Grenadians, May God Bless You" by the Motorway All-Stars, on the Motorway label.

FF That was done in Trinidad, Antigua, Jamaica...

Max Romeo did a cut called "Jamaicans May God Bless You" (sings with FF).

They imported them from Grenada?

They released them here. These guys got a ticket over and came with their tape, 'cos they were selling so many on import. I used to sell 100 a week over the counter in the shop. It was called Pama Records — Soundville. It's now Jet Star, 78 Craven Park Road. I worked there in the summer up

'til Christmas, when Fitzroy Stirling left. Those records were amazing sellers. But people don't make those records now, or don't put them out in the right way.

Was that a calypso record from Grenada?

FF More spoogey. In between soul, spoogey, reggae.

That record was massive. Other records would come in, sell a lot and go, but those records would be selling the same, week in, week out, as they were a year before. I used to go to a lot of parties held by Vincentians I knew out in High Wycombe — Mrs Clark and some other people. The standard records they had in the collection were "Dr Kitch" the original version from Trinidad ...

FF (sings) "I am not a qualified physician..."

Yeah, by Lord Kitchener. The label had 25 or 30 records by him, but the big one was "Dr Kitch". Colossal seller, "Grenadians, May God Bless You", we're going back to around '74 perhaps. Two records by the Mighty Sparrow — "Mr Walker" and "Rosemarie", and the Pama record of the Watford Gospellers.

Jim Reeves?

You can't compare any of them to Jim Reeves. The *Jim Reeves Christmas Album*, each year still sells 5,000 to 10,000 in London alone.

FF The only person who can stand up to him is Bing Crosby.

Jim Reeves has got 45 albums on the RCA Camden series, which are now £1.99. Then they were 99p. If you can talk about things going off the shelf ... If I was to open a shop plonk in the middle of Harlesden I'd have the records that sold. This is being 100% honest. I'd have the best selection of import material that you could think of, right. I'd strictly stock imports from Jamaica, a select amount of albums. No 12" singles from this country. None. I'd be catering for buyers who want 7" records for sound systems; albums for people who listen to good quality stuff at home, and the grown-ups, who'd get pride of place in that building — be treated how they want to be treated. I'd have the shop split into two halves. One half would be totally catering for the grown-ups. If you look after them, they'd encourage their kids to go down there to get records for them. All the old ladies used to like me 'cos I was ever so polite to them. Used to say "Got this new record for you, have a listen to this one ..." They wouldn't remember the titles — they'd come in and say three lines of a song and you'd have to be really sussed out to what record it was.

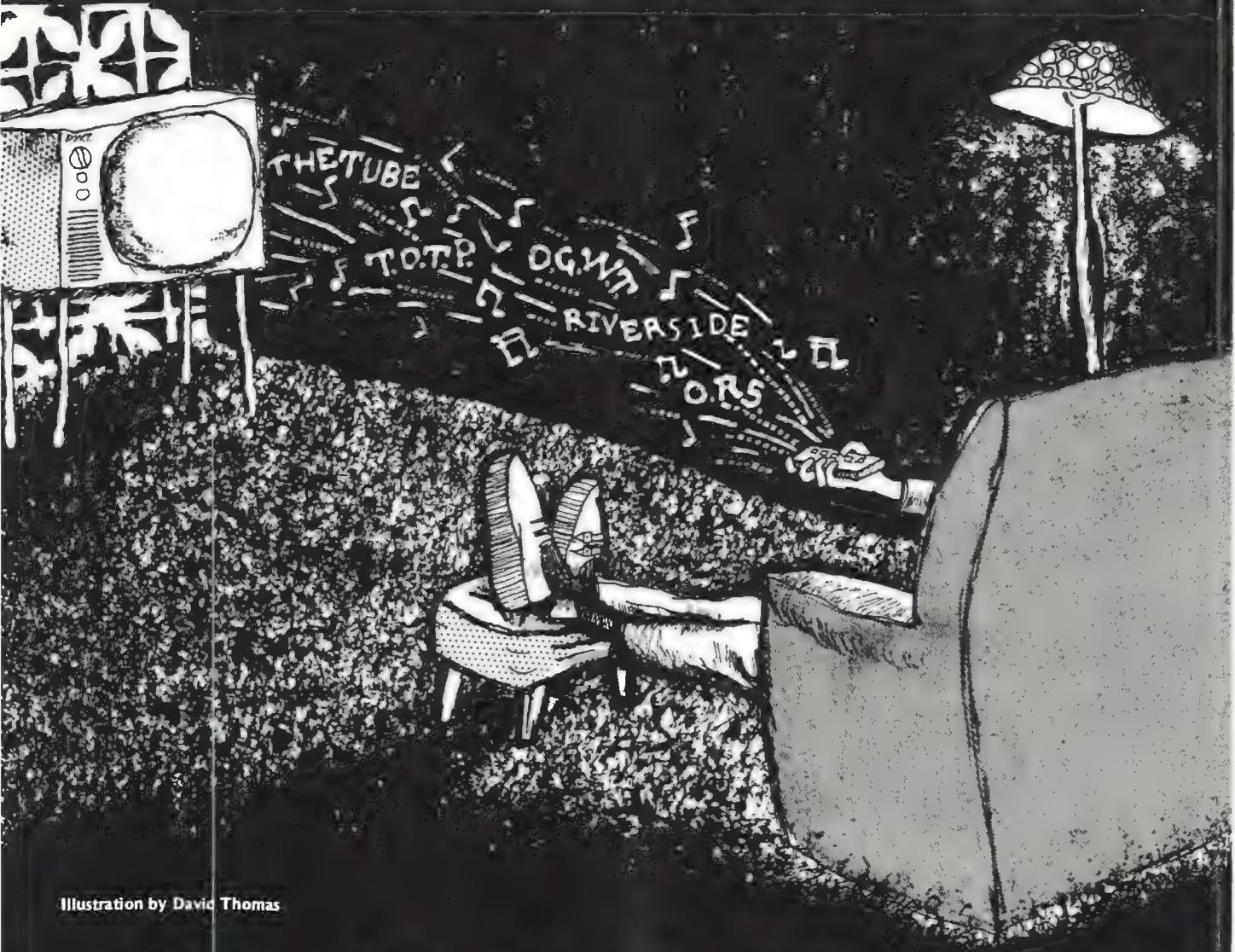


Illustration by David Thomas

# CAN YOU DANCE TO IT?

## ROCK on TV

by Simon Frith

A television set is all wrong for music. It's too small, too soft and too still, an obstinate piece of furniture. You can't be overwhelmed by a television set — it has no physical presence — and television pop is not about music working but music packaging. The sound is the background, used to signal a mood or an attitude. The tv issue is image not noise: does it make any difference if performers mime or play live?

Television is seen through private eyes, happens at home with family and friends, not in halls with crowds of strangers.

But tv programmes aren't (or weren't, before video) under private control (like the record player). TV music can't be fitted into one's moods and needs at will; it offers no sense of possession. Pop programmers have to use scheduling devices to make their shows cults, to give their audiences the sense of community that comes from a shared organisation of time. *American Bandstand* greeted youth home each day from school; *Ready Steady Go* began the teenage weekend.

Television represents rock after the event. Rock shows are trans-

Bubble as they will and must with well-trained spontaneous enthusiasm, the Top of the Pops audience fails to elicit much more from us punters than moans of boredom and irritation. If music is exciting live, we wonder, why is it so boring when it's on the telly? Simon Frith has a message to all the satin bomber jacketed producers, zombie DJs and embarrassed performers. Read on, if you have the nerve ...

lations: one mode of signification (a record, a performance) has to become another, a television event. Television events are planned, controlled, scripted. TV "vitality" and "surprise" are rehearsed according to running times, commercial breaks, the problems of an evening's continuity and flow. Happenings on television, unexpected events, are rare (hence the suspicion that even the Sex Pistols' Grundy appearance was fixed), and rock ideologues, from Zappa to Lydon, have denounced tv as "slime". Don Kirshner, America's most suc-

cessful rock tv producer (the man behind the Monkees) explained the success of his 1970s *Rock Concert* series in terms of the opportunity it gave teenagers to watch "in safety" the hard rock bands their parents wouldn't let them see live.

Television is always "safe". It puts no value on performing qualities that depend on spontaneity, improvisation, daring, offence. Max Miller wasn't right for British tv variety; black Americans were excluded from the US equivalent (despite the place they'd won in Vaudeville) —

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► their modes of expression weren't amenable to tv rules (and so jazz dancing was killed by neglect and we got instead the pseudo-balletic choreographed routines that still infect the television account of disco). It took Motown (using advice from old black dance masters) to redefine soul as a precisely ordered tv special.

## ROCK AS COMMODITY

Television has the most undifferentiated audience of all the mass media; programmes put together alliances of interest. Rock has the most exclusive audience of all the mass media; rock success feeds off illusions of conflict and cult. The question: how to address the tv audience and the rock audience simultaneously? The answer: focus on rock as commodity. K-Tel's pioneering tv commercials in the early 1970s reached audiences for records that previous sales methods hadn't, and every year there is new evidence of tv's astonishing pop selling power — think of Sheena Easton and, currently, the kids from *Fame*. And television, of course, made teenybop culture: the Monkees, the Osmonds and David Cassidy. The medium makes a record-buying market out of girls otherwise excluded (by age and sex and parents) from pop culture; the girls make pop idols out of actors (David McCallum, David Essex, David Soul) who have no street credibility at all.

Elvis Presley broke nationally only after his appearances on networked variety shows (*Steve Allan*, etc) and all rock stars since owe their impact to television. It's not just *Top of the Pops* that makes bands' careers, not just "commercial" acts that sell themselves. Ricky Lee Jones's first LP sold in the UK, for example, only because of her *Whistle Test* appearance; Leon Redbone's American recording career was made viable by his *Saturday Night Live* spots. Elvis Costello won't do pop press interviews but did appear on *Tiswas*, wriggling nervously out of the bubble gum blowing contest. Debbie Harry, even more bizarrely, was interviewed by *Swap Shop*'s children: "Is your hair a natural colour?" "What do you like doing most?" She wriggled nervously too. The effectiveness of such appearances has nothing to do with "good television". It's measured by record sales, and every rock performer on television is a form of promotion — performers' own videos (whatever the art school quotes) are the most blatant sales devices of them all. Remember that it was Abba who first worked out how to visualise themselves in a way that fitted snugly into every pop show in every country in the world.

## NOT BILLBOARDS

But tv producers don't like to

think of their shows as billboards. They treat rock as:

art, the approach of the *South Bank Show* and *Omnibus*, dull biographies of rock "creators" current affairs, the organising logic of all the magazine shows: *Whistle Test* emerged from *Colour Me Pop*, an offshoot of *Late Night Line Up*; Granada's *So It Goes* used the early evening news slot to tell people what was "happening" youth expression, the most common use of rock, whether in the BBC's youth club approach (from *Drumbeat* and *Six-Five Special* to *Riverside*), ITV's adolescent consumer shows (from *Oh Boy* and *Ready Steady Go to Revolver*), or the USA's teen ideology packages (*American Bandstand*, *Shindig*, *Soul Train*) entertainment, part of tv's ceaseless variety show — Elvis was put in his place on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, the Rolling Stones in theirs on *Sunday Night at the London Palladium*, *Thank Your Lucky Stars*, *Juke Box Jury*, and female performers, from Lulu to Toyah, have all been typecast according to the same television notion of sex and glamour.

Each of these approaches to rock (art/news/youth/entertainment) involves different conventions of musical spectacle and representation, and most rock tv shows try to combine them all so it's not surprising they're such a mess. TV producers talk about the problem of capturing on screen the "essence" of rock, the "reality" of the rock experience. The music business talks about promotion. The "reality" of rock is the market place, and the most illuminating musical images on television are the album ads, the direct results of market research, the most transparent images of pop appeal.

## REMINDERS OF THE EVENT

Rock television, rock videos, gesture at the "real" rock experience but can't provide it directly. The most common clip is still the filmed live show — a visual reminder of a rock event, not the event itself. The tv question becomes how to give a dead medium a live feel, how to use rock's performing conventions to give viewers at home a sense of membership and live concerts enable producers to set up the meaning of the audience directly. Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* had firm dress rules for its dancing teenagers, they had to look clean and smart, and studio admission was limited to 14-18 year-olds who had the right degree of "malleable enthusiasm". *Top of*



Gene Vincent on English tv, mid-'60s

*the Pops* achieves the same effect by employing Equity members, and even a series like *Rock Goes To College* was careful to vet its crowds: these early evening, dry, student union shows bore little relationship to the usual college gig.

## A SENSE OF AUDIENCE?

The key to a tv rock show is its presenter, whose job is to represent us (Radio 1 deejays say "you" on the air, "we" on the screen; the *Whistle Test*'s meaning is still tied up with old reactions to Bob Harris). The crisis of pop tv now is, as Jon Savage has argued, that "youth" '50s or '60s style, no longer exists. Presenters have to represent a community that isn't there (think of all those bossy, chatty fools on *Riverside*). Why has John Peel suddenly become a regular on *Top of the Pops*? Because he's the only BBC person with a sense of audience left.

## FLOURISHING ON THE BOX

I watch music on television to see what the performers look like. I love seeing *Top of the Pops* stars develop tv confidence as the hits keep coming. What changes? their ability to look at the camera as a friend. I want to see what performers look like as a clue to what they are like, and performers must take account of this too, must learn how to appear to take us into their confidence. Rock performance is a spectacle, television performance is intimate, and the performers who flourish on the box (from Elvis Presley to Barry Manilow and Haircut 100) are those who can be *spectacularly intimate* (adopting, in fact tv advertisers' address). In the 1930s, electronic recording devices didn't destroy live performance but, rather, made successful the crooners and emotional technicians who could make their public voice a private experience. Television opened up similar possibilities — the chance to watch a

performance being *made*, to see new emotional accounts of that old pop phenomenon, personality. The pleasure of tv rock, though, is to *see through it*, to grasp an appearance (Jimi Hendrix on the *Lulu Show*, Public Image Limited on *Whistle Test*) as a menace to the conventions surrounding it. TV rock shows always want to be knowing — to nudge us as fellow members of a cult, to instruct us as would-be followers of fashion (see the present double act on *Whistle Test*), but the best TV pop shows, *The T.A.M.I. Show*, *Ready Steady Go*, worked because no-one making them had the slightest clue what was going on.

## THE VIDEO EXPERIENCE

Rock entrepreneurs have been involved in video production for at least 10 years, and video clips are now essential to record selling. This is not just a matter of marketing. There has always been loose capital floating around rock, and successful musicians are more likely than most investors to follow up technological ideas, if only because rock success means success in all aspects of record production — most musicians know their way round the studio and the sales circuit. But the easy moves rock performers make from music to video reflects too their visual confidence (their roots in art and film schools), the fact that all rock performance means putting on an image, an appearance, a show. And so, the argument goes, television, via video, is now a place of pop art, no longer just a family affair. Is it? Have you ever seen a good rock video? What does a "good" rock video mean? Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody'? The Boomtown Rats' 'I Don't Like Mondays'? David Bowie's 'Ashes To Ashes'? Anything by Spandau Ballet?

Channel 4 is the last shot of the '60s. □ □ □



# I live the life I sing about

photo by Sam Treicher



Dorsey and Hannah at the Tribute

## Georgia Tom Dorsey in the Hall of Fame

by Steven Harvey

Last November's British premiere of "Say Amen Somebody" in the London Film Festival was the most effective three-handkerchief weepie since Bette Davis classics like "Now Voyager" and "Dark Victory". An overpoweringly moving film, it profiles the lives of one of the original travelling saints, Willie Mae Ford Smith, and the commonly acknowledged pioneer of gospel music, Thomas Dorsey. Steven Harvey attended the 1982 tribute to Thomas Dorsey in New York and finds that at 83, with two broken hips, the author of "Precious Lord" is still going strong.

An extraordinary and well deserved tribute to one of the pioneers of gospel music took place in New York at The Songwriters' Hall of Fame on September 7. The tribute was for Thomas Dorsey, often called 'The Father of Gospel Music'. The Hall of Fame is housed in The Academy of Popular Music, located in

Times Square. It functions as a repository and archive for the history of American songwriting. It houses extensive collections of records, books on music, and sheet music as well as cases of memorabilia ranging from Clara Ward's sequinned black gown and tambourine, to Gershwin's silent practice piano, to Fats Waller's stand-up keyboard which rests on a small stage to be played on special occasions like this tribute.

Born in Villa Rica, Georgia in 1899, Dorsey is credited with coining the term 'gospel' in the '20s, as well as writing the first gospel song *per se*. He grew up in Atlanta listening to the early Dr. Watts' hymns, as well as blues and jazz. His early aptitude prompted a secular musical career while Dorsey was still in his teens. He joined Ma Rainey as an accompanist, and composed numerous blues songs for Rainey, Bessie Smith and Clara Hudmon (known as "The Georgia Peach"). Often his blues lyrics took a decidedly sexual bent. His most well-known secular song, when he was still known as Georgia Tom, is "It's Tight Like That".

Unlike many gospel folk, Dorsey is comfortable with his secular music background, and he continued to compose blues for some time after returning to the Baptist church of which his father

was a minister. Before Dorsey, in the early 1900s, black church music consisted of spirituals, hymns, jubilee quartets and shouting preachers. His immediate predecessor and inspiration was the religious composer, Dr C.H. Tindley of Philadelphia, whom Dorsey himself credits with having written the first gospel songs around 1905.

### IF YOU SEE MY SAVIOR

When Dorsey got saved at a Baptist convention in 1921 he started applying his blues melodicism to religious music. In 1926, inspired by the death of a friend, he composed his first gospel song, "If You See My Savior Tell Him That You Saw me." Since then he hasn't looked back, composing hundreds of songs, coaching many of the greatest singers like Sallie Martin, Roberta Martin and Mahalia Jackson. In 1932 he convened the first Gospel Singers Convention with some 3,000 voices, an event that leads directly to the recent popularity of mass choirs like that of James Cleveland.

At 83, Dorsey is still going strong, despite two recently broken hips which require him to use a walker. He arrived at the tribute accompanied by two men, all three dressed in immaculate white

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suits and matching red ties. His constant companion is Dr Clayton Hannah, preacher and gospel music historian who provided a revival meeting spirit with his rhymed pronouncements about Dorsey's life.

Sightless gospel singer, Julia Doyle Bess, gave rousing renditions of selected Dorsey tunes; gospel radio dj Bobby Jay emceed; Josh White Jr. performed one of Dorsey's finest tunes, "I'm Going To Live The Life I Sing About In My Song", inspired by the commercialization of gospel that accompanied its growing popularity. Dorsey received an award from BMI (he had wisely set up his own publishing house early on). Throughout the tribute Dorsey conducted the singers from his chair with inimitably expressive hand gestures. It didn't matter if the singers weren't looking, he just had to conduct.

### SO HIGH AND PURE

What brought the house down, though, was when Dorsey himself rose up with Hannah to perform some of his own music. With Hannah loudly feeding him the lyrics, and occasionally calling out, "This is an unpublished verse!" (on standards like "Precious Lord") his voice was a tremulous falsetto so high and pure that he could be heard even when only Hannah was using the mike. The effect of seeing this 83-year old composer was electrifying. He could be his own best interpreter with blues whoops, flats and slurs betraying his earlier musical career.

Afterwards a friend and I went up to thank him for the program and as he shook both our hands at once he said; 'If you ever need anything, call me. I've had so much and that's what I'm here for.'

### SAY AMEN, SUGARHILL

Of related interest are two recent events. Sugarhill Records, the largest independent label associated with rap, has acquired the Chess Records catalogue. Among the first re-releases issued is the album, *Aretha Gospel*. These are her first recordings made when she was 14, recorded live in her father, C.L. Franklin's, New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit. Aretha at that point, was heavily under the influence of her father's friend, Clara Ward. Listening to her two-part interpretation of Dorsey's "Precious Lord" one hears the same intensely affecting expression of musical feeling that she has many years later singing Marvin Gaye's "Wholy Holy" on her *Amazing Grace* album. Both are songs that beg to be listened to over and over again.

Thomas Dorsey is also featured in a recent movie by George T. Nurenburg, *Say Amen Somebody*, which was premiered at The New York Film Festival in October. Along with Dorsey are gospel pioneers Sallie Martin and Willie Mae Ford Smith. The film brings the music, character and lives of these great artists out of the churches in a manner so vivid as to confound even the most dedicated atheist.



## The image of women in Haitian music

Though Haiti's recent history has been blighted by the awful dictatorships of 'Papa' and 'Baby' Doc, its music is fast becoming its best ambassador. When Gloria Legros, a Haitian resident in Paris, visited Trinidad last year, she was able to hear the music of her own island, particularly that of the popular Tabou Combo, as she travelled around on the buses. But what she heard was most impressive for the picture it painted of the conditions of women in Haiti, especially through the songs of the locally known "Mini-Jazz bands".



Today there are more than a score of Mini-Jazz bands, most based in Port-au-Prince, New York City and Boston, and most comprising seven or eight young, lower middle class male members. They began to spring up in the early 1960s at the height of Papa Doc's repression at a time when the rather nationalistic popular music which had grown up since the 1946 political upheaval was being called subversive. One song which disturbed the middle class, for example, mocked the big Societe Haitiano-Americaine De Developpement Agricole (SHADA).

There were other bands, but they were all hampered by too identifiable class and colour ties. However, from 1964 on, the Mini-Jazz bands managed to straddle the elite and the masses and while staying physically apart from the latter, they played in fashionable clubs and at parties and celebrations of the bourgeoisie.

### TONTONS MACOUTES

Political repression was at a peak; politics was a taboo subject. In Haiti, with its African cultural past, words are sacred as a fount of creation, but under Duvalier then, only silence was permitted. In the market places, talk was impossible because the Tontons Macoutes were always present,

collecting informal 'taxes' and physically eliminating those who resisted. any gathering of more than 10 people was banned unless by special permission of the secret police.

You couldn't travel from one town to another without being searched by Tontons Macoutes at roadblocks. In the evening, under cover of the regular electricity power cuts from six to eight and from ten until the early morning, the dictator's henchmen did away with their enemies. As dawn rose, people would find corpses in the streets. They would sometimes be left there for a while to induce terror and obedience. After an attempt on the life of Papa Doc's young son Jean-Claude, his aides promised 'a Himalaya of corpses'.

### MIGHT WAS RIGHT

Repression was everywhere: it brutalised relationships between parents and children and between teachers and students. Might was right. Suspicion permeated everything. The economy was falling apart and as so often in such times, anxiety, misery and fear eroded personal morality and conscience. For example, it took no little courage, (even bravery) for a man to protect a woman from the sexual harassment and provocations of the Tontons Macoutes.





Humiliated, deprived of any means to defend his dignity and honour, the Haitian husband sought a way out by blaming his wife for everything, even pretending she enjoyed such situations because of the material advantages she might obtain from them.

The psychology was similar to that under slavery. When a planter 'took' a slave's wife, the slave resigned himself. He blamed the woman rather than the system: black women who bore mulatto children had particularly bad reputations.

### SONGS OF SILENCES

The Mini-Jazz groups, in this disturbed social ambience, played music with virtually no words or with minimal lyrics. The group *Les Fantaisistes De Carrefour* sang about nature and women:

'There are times when everyone must think about who they are... Like a little bird who can't sing any more and is sad... For the birds in the sky, there's no sun...'

Lines such as those alluded to the imposed silence and to the way it degraded people. The songs about women praised their beauty and their vivacity, and they also talked about their 'place' and the traditional roles. Peasant songs tended to be much blunter:

'Go back to your Mammy, Angel, Don't give me any more trouble. A girl who can't wash, iron or make a good soup... Stay with your Mammy, Angelina.'

The singers in the Mini-Jazz bands were speaking to a middle class female audience.

### THE HEYDAY OF THE "MINI-JAZZ"

Under Papa Doc, Haiti got no foreign aid. The Tontons Macoutes seized their victims' property but were careful not to get noticed by the President, who customarily did away with those he deemed too greedy or ambitious.

With 'Baby Doc' enthroned, those restrictions have disappeared; making money and stealing it seems to have completely taken over — extreme examples being the sale of corpses and the blood of the malnourished, and on one point plans were made to ship to the United States Haitian urine, carefully collected from public toilets which were to be built specifically for the purpose.

Relations between men and women are still distrustful. Men have no moral authority over women, partly because they have no work: unemployment and under-employment is now around 70% in the capital alone. Men and women get by as best they can. Only money matters. Luxury, symbolised particularly by cars, has become the obsession of middle class Haitians. The men say women are seduced by it, that they are becoming more ambitious and are more coldly calculating about their own material success.

The 'liberalisation' of the regime under Jean-Claude Duvalier led to more sophisticated lyrics, and Haitian women became the main focus of the singers.

### "D" FOR DUTIFUL

The women in the songs of the Mini-Jazz groups are all from the middle or lower middle class. In real life, she is lazy, with no real productive role either in the house or outside it. She has one or two servants to do the chores, and she treats them like objects, thoroughly exploiting and humiliating them (they are usually other women), and effectively preventing them from having any private life.

In Haiti, a servant toils from dawn to dusk for a pittance of somewhere between \$4-\$15 a month. Everyone in the house is on her back, the mistress, the master, the children — and she still has her own children and husband to think of and attend to.

Another Haitian custom is 'Reste-Avec', where a young child is handed over by its destitute peasant parents to well-off town families in the hope of giving it some chance in life. But the little ward becomes in effect a slave — required to do work but getting a small amount of food and clothing instead of a wage. In some households, they are beaten daily, their screams only increasing the rage of their tormentor-mistresses.

The lower middle class woman is not respected by her husband, who regards her as a parasite and a bloodsucker. She lives in constant fear of being abandoned for a rival. So she thinks only about the welfare of her children and how to keep her social status. Marriage she sees simply as a social position, in contrast to the working class or peasant woman who chooses concubinage — a relationship of two people.

Women from poorer classes rarely marry, partly because marriage in Haiti is disadvantageous for a woman, whatever society says about it officially. Yet people still say a man has been 'caught' when he announces his marriage. Apart from a loss of identity, marriage makes a woman 'irresponsible' because it turns her into a legal minor. She abandons herself to her husband to whom she must be dutiful with a capital "D".

### WOMAN: IMPRISONED IN HER SEX

The Mini-Jazz songs, sung by men, help perpetuate the myth of women as faithless, sly, cunning parasites. The lower middle class woman becomes a sort of huge vagina. Her sexual organ is a fetish through which it's said she can get anything she wants; can succeed in everything. The group Tabou Combo takes this degradation of women to an extreme, using song words almost impossible to translate, but understood by everyone:

'Oh how she dances, the little darling,  
I'll put some "chinour" in her "chinour"  
Oh how she moves, the little darling  
I want to say it but I can't  
don't cry out, don't cry out  
I'd like to beat her, I'd like  
to beat her  
I want to eat her...'

*Chinour* is a kind of aphrodisiac, and can also be used, as here, to mean the female sexual organ.

In the simplest Christian imagery, a woman is Eve — the temptress, the companion of the devil. Restraint is part of it too. The woman must not lead a man into any kind of temptation. She must be modest, discreet, reserved. In fact, young Haitian men often panic when confronted with a female sexuality. The sensual, pleasure-seeking woman is hated because she can't be tamed. If she demands things, and is true to her sexual feelings, she tends to be regarded as a whore and a degenerate.

### BEAUTY AND SOCIAL CLASS

The woman in the songs is always beautiful. In fact, the term 'woman' is never used to describe a servant, a worker or a peasant. Beauty comes through money, pretty dresses, cosmetics and straightened hair. One well-known song, by the group Bossa-Combo, which used to belong to Baby Doc himself, illustrates this very well. It's called "Permanents":

'Men have a terrible burden  
to bear  
with snooty women  
They speak French all the time  
They don't do anything  
It's just 'my sacred permanent'.  
They just walk in the street,  
their hair on display  
But when it goes wrong  
After three months it's  
back in a frizz.  
They spend all day at the Cinema.  
Oh do what you like  
Who are you?  
You say you're this, you're  
that'

Oh do what you like.  
You've had a perm and  
you're showing off  
Fingernails, toenails, dollars  
You ask me for dollars for  
a shampoo, for a touch-up  
Permanent, permanence,  
dollar  
Please god, save me  
Permanent up my ass  
Look at the beautiful  
woman after her hair-do.'

This song was composed after a sad, real-life incident some years ago. On the eve of her wedding, a young woman straightened her pubic hair — gave herself a permanent — to try to pass for a mulatto. The chemical burned her genitals, the wounds became infected and she died a few days later.

The story shocked the whole country and inspired the song. It associates beauty and class with straight hair: 'Who are you?... You've had a perm and you're showing off.' In other words, only mulattoes have a right to hold up their heads. The man's lack of respect for the black woman is fed by her own view of herself as inferior.

### THE ONLY WORTHY WOMAN IS A MOTHER

The only kind of woman who finds favour with Mini-Jazz singers is the mother. Unlike the faithless, cunning, wallet-stealing wife, the mother is put on a pedestal. To insult her is more serious than a physical assault. The mother is essential. She has never betrayed her children's confidence:

'A mother, that's the best gift of all  
She carried me for nine months in pain  
No-one can take her place  
No-one can match her love  
Her affection is unique  
You're there on the good days  
You're there on the bad days.'  
(by the group, Accolade)

A father is not indispensable. He's regarded as a kind of automatic child maker. You don't have to know your father, but not to know your mother is to be virtually damned. As a Haitian proverb says, 'A child can have several "fathers" but only one mother.'

The intimacy between mother and child is seen as the strongest possible bond between two human beings. Motherhood is a duty and a destiny. Sterility in a woman is regarded as a disgrace.

The words of the Mini-Jazz songs don't describe the real

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Illustration by Gblet



Haitian woman. The theme of supposed faithlessness of the lower middle class woman is the opposite of the truth. The real target of deceit and double-dealing is still the woman. In 1979, the group B.P. Express made an effort to be fair to women by mentioning the existence of sexual harassment at the workplace:

'Some bosses aren't looking for ability . . .  
But just for a piece of . . .  
Men, you've got to change  
You mustn't think of kisses

when you're at work.  
These guys are terrible  
Look at how them make a  
working woman suffer.'

We have, of course, seen women singing at the tops of their voices songs which are insulting to them without really noticing. But a lot of them obviously hate themselves. The overall repression of the Haitian woman gives her little chance to analyse her own situation.

In 1974, a young graduate

nurse in Port-au-Prince lost her job and her diploma because she became pregnant while not married. She was transferred to a hospital in the distant provinces, far from the 'decent' society of the capital, and was given a very junior post. According to the rules, she could get her job and status back when she got married.

In the countryside, after a wedding in which the bride is discovered not to be a virgin, the angry husband takes his new in-laws a symbolic gift of an opened bottle of coke and a hollowed-

out loaf.

So it isn't comfortable to be a woman in Haiti, but any change in her status is closely tied to far-reaching changes in political and social attitudes and in the law.

N.B.: As mentioned, other bands, such as *Coupe Cloue*, don't count as *Mini-Jazz* because of their humble social origin. But *Coupe Cloue*, which is very popular, deserves a study of its own, because of its particular dehumanisation of women. □ □ □



## Interviews of our Time - no. 2

# Buck Funk

Legendary multi-instrumentalist, vocalist. Age – unknown. Transcribed by Lol Coxhill from a recently discovered taped interview. Recordist and interviewer unknown. Final response lost due to erosion and flaking.

Interviewer: Buck . . . may I use your first name?

Buck: If you mean in reference to me. Sure thing. If you want to score from layin' personal claim – no way, Father.

This is going to be fun.

You bet.

Buck, I know that you were christened with . . .

Stop right there. I use water to clean up, not to increase my chances in the Life Hereafter. Dig?

Badly phrased, I fear. I'll try again.

Do that.

Buck, I know that you were originally named Arnold Prendergast, which is not an easy handle for a jazz hipster such as yourself. But how come Buck Funk? Crazy tag, man. How come?

Well now . . . I remember when I was a real little guy, my Daddy used to take me on his knee – an' he was a real big ol' cat. No shit! Dig? I'd sit there like I was ridin' a elephant. Man. Just like that little guy in the movies. BooBoo . . . Sabu. Right. Right. Sabu. Man!

That little mother could ride. Like he got glue on his ass. Dig? Now my ol' Daddy – he'd set into a humpin'n'bumpin'away'n' tappin' his foot 'n'bouncin' me up 'n' down like there was no tomorrow. Sometimes I'd get so into it that I'd puke right on up down over his shoe. But Daddy was cool. You dig? He'd just keep on tappin' away with his foot. Other was long gone. Man. Shark in Solent. Bad. Right? Man, I'd ride that big ol' knee, listening to Daddy playin' all those ol' Bunk Johnson 78s hour after hour until I knew every solo that cat ever recorded before he lost his damn teeth. I came to hate that bastard so much that when I launched myself into the Business, I thought it'd be pretty cool to change my name to an anagram based on my feelings towards that asshole. I didn't have to think too hard to come up with Buck Funk. Dig?

Yes. That was rather a good idea, Dad. Sounds fine. Slides off the tongue 'n' hangs on the line.

Man. Man! Now you're rappin' – you some mother – well alreet.

Coming from you, Buck, that is praise indeed. By the way, I clocked your suit on the way in. Way out. Do you use that phrase back home?

Yeah. We call 'em suits.

No. No. I mean that I noticed your . . . er . . . threads. Cut so great, man.

Yeah? Well, I promised myself that when I made out on the Scene, and started to score big bread I'd get me the sharpest dinner jacket on God's Green Earth. I got it, man.

I'll say!

What'll ya say, man?

Eh? Oh, a mere expression.

Well, face another direction. Man, I ain't about to pay no cleanin' bills.

What? Oh yes. Back to work. From where do you hail? Your . . . birthplace, if I may?

You gotta pretty far out verbal style, my man. Portsmouth.

I hear that New Hampshire is beautiful at this time of year.

Wouldn't know, Pompey. Dig? Never been to the other place.

But . . . you're from Stateside!

First I've heard of it, man. Never been there either.

Come on. Listen. All those endless stories of paddle packet trips up-river, to check your roots and get your chops together . . .

Only ferryboats I been on were the disco cruises around the Isle of Wight for bread'n'perks. Like these threads I'm wearin'. Dig? Anythin' to avoid a repeat of the horrors of my first gig. No bread up front. Had to score my ol' Daddy's tux, cut it down 'n' glue it together again. Just dried in time for first call. No good. Spot-heat melted it. Disintegration totale, man. Goodness me.

Oh whaaat? How absolutely horrifying for you. Were you actually headlining? Or were you just trying to make a name for yourself?

I was playin' in the band, man. Dig? Sleeves fell off on the segue take-over. "Summertime" to

Though generally known as a skilled performer on more conventional brass/reed instruments, Buck Funk, in his earlier days, spent much of his time adapting existing instruments to form new musically valid hybrids. This very rare early '40s photograph shows him with what he named the 'saxoclarisoon', which is a combination of a tenor saxophone body minus the crook, which is replaced by a clarinet barrel, drilled to allow for the insertion of a reshaped bassoon crook. The resultant tone is not unlike that of a quail, with the advantage of the extended lower range, made possible by the length of the tenor saxophone, which is much greater than that of the quail's voice chords in many cases. The basic pitch of the new instrument is vaguely based around F sharp with a range of seven and a half octaves.

"Cherry Pink". Thank Mother nobody plays those tunes anymore. Never wanna hear them again. Heavy drag, if you read my meanin'

I see. Bum trip, Dad. Let's talk music. Buck, is there one particular person who has particularly inspired you and helped you to find your own path on the Scene?

Wilton Crawley.

Now that's a name I don't recall.

Your loss, good buddy. Father of the avant-garde, but he was still good despite that. Got that ol' slap-tongue licked. They called it hokum then. Now it's personal expression and very serious. Every tasteless mother go pukkapukka. Big deal! Horseshit.

Sounds smashing.

Certainly does, old boy.

Well, Buck, many thanks. I've got all I need. So I won't bother you any further.

You couldn't. Okay. Gonna catch a gig at Potter's Place in Arundel. Gangaheavycats hangin' out.

Er . . . Cool! Hang loose, man. Love those wingtip Bluchers. Neat! Neat! ○ ○ ○

### RELEVANT INFORMATION:

Wilton Crawley is featured with his own band on RCA RD-7914, *Mr. Jelly Lord*.

A collection of previously unissued recordings of Buck Funk's music is currently in preparation for release in cassette form only by Associate Records, UK. Hopefully, this compilation of tracks from various 'live' sessions will include examples of Funk's work with Denzil Bailey's Afro-Cubists.



## LETTERS TO: COLLUSION, 14 Peto Place, London NW1.

### ROCK'N'ROLL AGEISTS

Thanks for the issue of *Collusion*; lots of interesting stuff. I was very interested in the Madonna of the Airwaves, and the horrifying arbitrary way a popular programme can be dropped without anybody seeming to care.

Stuart Cosgrove's piece was on the ball; I never knew that Sly Stone had been an Em-Cee for the James Brown show. Makes sense a lot of things, that connection.

A couple of minor corrections: Elmore James never recorded for Sun (I made the same mistake in *Sound of the City*); he did record in Memphis, but for Meteor Records, a local outpost of the Los Angeles-based Modern-RPM set-up. And Rufus Thomas was never actually contracted to Sun; I interviewed him on one of his tours over here, and he said that he never signed a contract with anyone, record companies, booking agencies, promoters. They trusted him, or he wasn't interested in working with them. That way, he felt free to make his own decisions. Stuart seemed surprised at the energy of an "old" man, but it is only the tyrannical youth-orientation of rock'n'roll that makes it surprising. I saw T-Bone Walker at the Festival Hall in the early '70s, full of tricks at the age of 60, and James Brown defies preconceptions about age diminishing energy.

I'll look forward to each issue with increasing interest. Any chance of one of your roving reporters catching up with Esther Phillips and Etta James while they are over here? Both must have some good stories to tell, starting from similar beginnings with Johnny Otis in the early '50s.

Charlie Gillett  
Oval Records, Clapham, London.

### SLIM AND SUN RA

Last Friday I saw Slim Gaillard perform at the Northsea Jazz Festival. He looked like an old tramp and had a long grey beard but he was wearing an expensive costume. He played mostly piano (a bit like Chico Marx) and some flamenco guitar ("ole", he said) and did a.o. cement mixer, flat float floozy, poppetty te pop goes my motorcyclist and the version of how high the moon as described in *Collusion*.

He did not speak any vout but talked a lot about barbecuing. In fact his talking was a lot better than his playing also because of the very bad Yugoslavian rhythm section with a saxophonist who played all horrible Berklee School of Music licks with a communist accent.

After the intermission the group was changed. Arnett Cobb played as a guest and after two pieces Max Rauch took over the drums. The audience didn't seem to know him, but enjoyed his jokes a lot (Gaillard of course).

The next day Sun Ra performed in the tent in the garden a version of hit that jive jack as a tribute to Gaillard.

Luc Houtkamp  
Holland.



### AMM

Many thanks for sending me *Collusion* 3 with the article on AMM. Hannah Charlton did a good job, except for arguing that AMM wasn't all that different from other groups of the time, which none of those concerned would support — at least they certainly didn't at the time.

I was also pleased to see Matthew Wright's piece on Slim Gaillard, another of my all-time favourites. But the quotation credited to "Laughin' In Rhythm, 1938" is actually from the 1951 version by Slim Gaillard and his Peruvians: vout language didn't exist in 1938.

Yours sincerely,  
Victor Schonfield  
London.



### AMM

Thank you for showing interest and publishing a piece about AMM (*Collusion* 3), sadly though, we feel that we must register our unhappiness with the article, we find the ideas contained offensive, embarrassing and inaccurate. Many of the points raised in the interviews are distorted in favour of sensationalism, more suited to the tabloid press.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank *Collusion* for the offer of space to reply to the points raised; there are many and the issues complex. However, in the absence of time to respond in detail we hope our music will speak for itself.

Best wishes,  
(and to quote Gavin Bryars in your last letters page: "all the best in fact and fiction")

AMM  
Keith Rowe  
Eddie Prevost  
John Tilbury  
London.



### MUSIC AND CRICKET

Summer has come and gone and with it your July-September number in which you were bold enough to include that article on music and cricket by Jez Parfett subtitled 'The Haile likely bi-sociation'. I wanted to write earlier and thank you for also including the photograph of Ranji taken by my father.

Naturally I read Jez's article with great interest and noted all of his generous quotations from Cardus and others. But wasn't he after all rather too generous? There was one particularly good paragraph which I quote again to refresh your memory:

*His astonishing improvisation ranged in dynamic contrast and tension from sotto voce to con-fuoco, exhibiting legato and staccato articulation of the wrists in conjunction with savage percussion and multiphonics variation of stroke...*

We can't ask Cardus to write for us any more, but here is someone, in any case, who might out-Cardus Cardus! Certainly in this

one paragraph Jez Parfett left me wishing he had quoted less and given us more from his own very eloquent pen!

Well done to you from your sense and to him for his own kind of hymn of praise!  
Yours sincerely,  
George A. Beldam  
Knowsley Road, London.



### POLISH RADIO

Thank you very much for your nice letter and excellent *Collusion* magazine. I enjoy reading and must say I'm impressed. It is not only well written, you are using good paper to print it on. When I hold it all the ink stays on the pages, not all over my hands. Nice touch! Your layout is great. Articles are well written and well thought out. Highly recommended — and all the best for the continued success of your publication.

I would appreciate if you'll publish my address and name and inform your readers that here in Poland, there is a chance to hear the finest recordings of good music. I don't see any problem with airing any good records on my own nationally broadcast programme on Polish National Radio.

It will be great if you'll send me regularly your *Collusion*, and I will do all things to bring your magazine to my area too.

All the best,  
Dioni Piatkowski  
(promoter, writer, dj-broadcaster, record and book reviewer, collector, music critic)  
Poznan-Wiry, Poland.



Illustrations by Peter Court



#### COMPETITION RESULTS: //

In the last issue we offered three SUGARHILL RAP ALBUMS if you could answer five simple questions.

Here are the answers for those who were flummoxed:

1. Sylvia Robinson runs Sugarhill Records.
2. Her recent answer record was called "It's Good to be the Queen".
3. Her mid-'70s hit was "Pillow Talk".
4. She recorded in the mid-'50s with Mickey Baker, guitarist.
5. Buddy Holly covered their hit "Love is Strange" also heard in the movie Badlands.

The 25 geniuses who all won three rap albums were:

Mike Mason of Perth; J. Andrews of Luton; Clive Sykes of Ipswich; Ms Cuypers of Amsterdam; P. Saward of Abridge; Pete Silvers of Wolverhampton; Kevin Siebke of Broxbourne; "Dieter" of Hanover; Lu Mason of London; Chris Williams of Oakley, Bed.; R. Buhlinger from Paris; D Carr of Southampton; Bill Palmer of California; Robert Plummer from Croydon; P Simmonds of Edinburgh; George Twomey of London; Bill White of Leeds; S. MacDiarmid of High Wycombe; Jake Harvey of New York; Gavin Potter of Herts; J Sydney of Edinburgh; Steve Barker of Preston; B Crooks of Dalston; Mary Collins of Cardiff; Dave Cole of York.

Congratulations! And many thanks to P.R.T. Records for donating the prizes. ○

# Whirling Winter Warmers

## RECORD CHOICES

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 Carroll Thompson SG21.  
 Boogie Woogie Fever Charly CR 30215. Hillbilly boogie. Steel guitars out of this world.  
 George Jones and Tammy Wynette Greatest Hits. Epic EPC 82035. The perfect vocal match.  
 Lord I've Really Been Trying Mildred Clark and the Melody-Aires. ABC Records PLP-59225. Featuring the great Eli Fountain on saxophone.  
 Phases of the Moon: Traditional Chinese Music. CBS 74038. Mostly sounds like King Hu movie soundtrack.  
 Bladerunner Soundtrack Vangelis. Not the version released on record but the one you hear at the pictures.  
 Rascality Alhaji Barrister & his Supreme Fuji Commanders. Intense, you bet!

DAVID TOOP

Dark City Sisters & The Flying Jazz Queens, Startime Volume 2. South African Andrews' Sisters to kwela rhythms, terrific  
 Jump To It Aretha Franklin. Arista 204 742. Back on top form and Luther Vandross production.  
 Honesty Curtis Mayfield. MD 33256-1 Boardwalk (US).  
 Les Ambassadeurs du Motel Sonafric SAF 50.014. Malian guitar group, passionate vocals, langorous, repetitive rhythms.  
 Soweto Rough Trade 37.  
 Sounds of Nairobi: Acoustic and Electric Guitar Music of Kenya. Original Music OMA/101 — valuable momento from John Storm Roberts' travels.  
 Soca in Shaolin Temple. Blueboy Romeo Records CRRA 1001 (US). Hong Kong meets the Caribbean in Brooklyn, a great dancer.  
 Carroll Thompson SG21 Queen of Lovers' Rock.  
 Sam Liberman y su Orchestra, "Casamento judaio". RCA (Argentina). Traditional Jewish cafe tearjerking from Argentinian Klezmer band.  
 Shipubilding Robert Wyatt. RT 115T 12" single. Haunting perspectives of the Falklands War.

SUE STEWARD

In the beginning Nat Cole Trio. AH 38 (deleted) 1940-1, with Oscar Moore and Wesley Prince.  
 For Ever, For Always, For love Luther Vandross. Colombia FE 38235 (US). Can't help it, I like soppy songs you can dance to...  
 Live Convention '82 Vol. 2. Disco-Wax DW2003 (US). Including the Grand Wizard Theodore.  
 Soweto. Rough Trade 37. Brilliant dance music compilation, including the New Lucky Boys  
 Wild Women with Steak Knives Diamanda Galas. Y18. From "Litanies of Satan". Fun  
 Live-Soncino ICP Orchestra. ICP 022. With the inevitable Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink  
 98.7 Kiss FM Presents Shep Pettibone's Mastermixes. Epic 22138  
 Beat the Street Sharon Redd. Prelude PRLA 13/2755. 12" single version, terrifying Kevorkian re-mix. B-side of "Never Give you Up"  
 Bongo Joe George Coleman. Arhoolie 1040 (US). Songs of dogs and transistors  
 Risin' to the Top/Hang Tight Keri Burke. RCAT252 (12" single)

STEVE BERESFORD

Illustration by Giblet

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Thu 3 KEELE University, Walter Moberly Hall 7.30pm  
Fri 4 LIVERPOOL Bluecoat 7.30pm  
Sat 5 DARLINGTON Arts Centre 8.00pm  
Sun 6 DURHAM Sir James Knott Hall, Trevelyan Coll. 7.30pm  
Mon 7 SHEFFIELD Leadmill 7.30pm  
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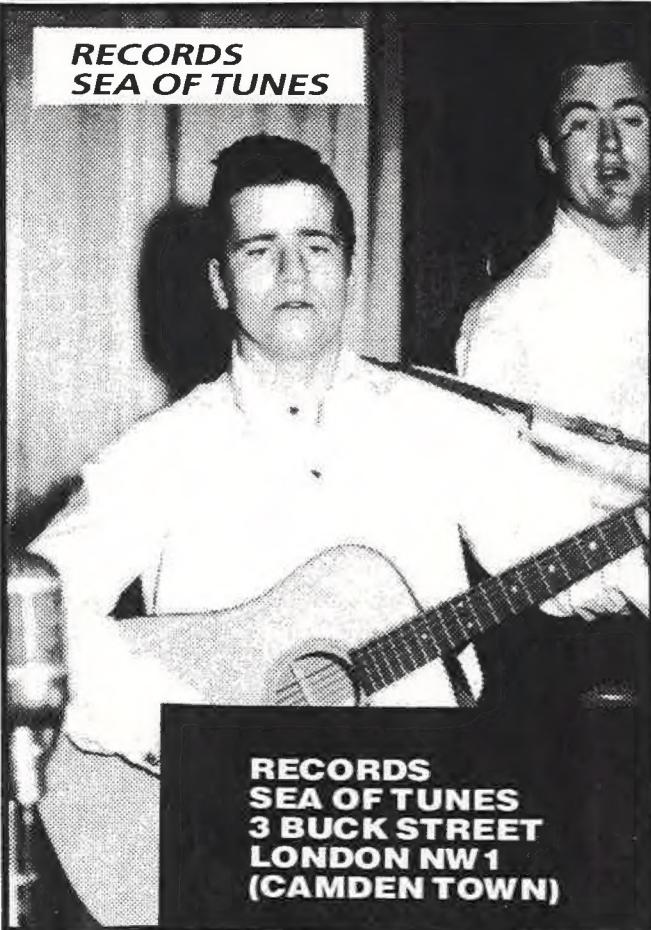
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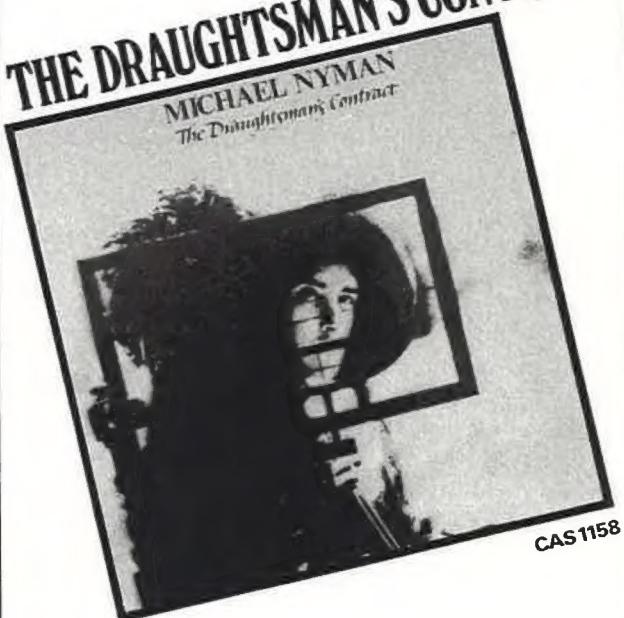
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